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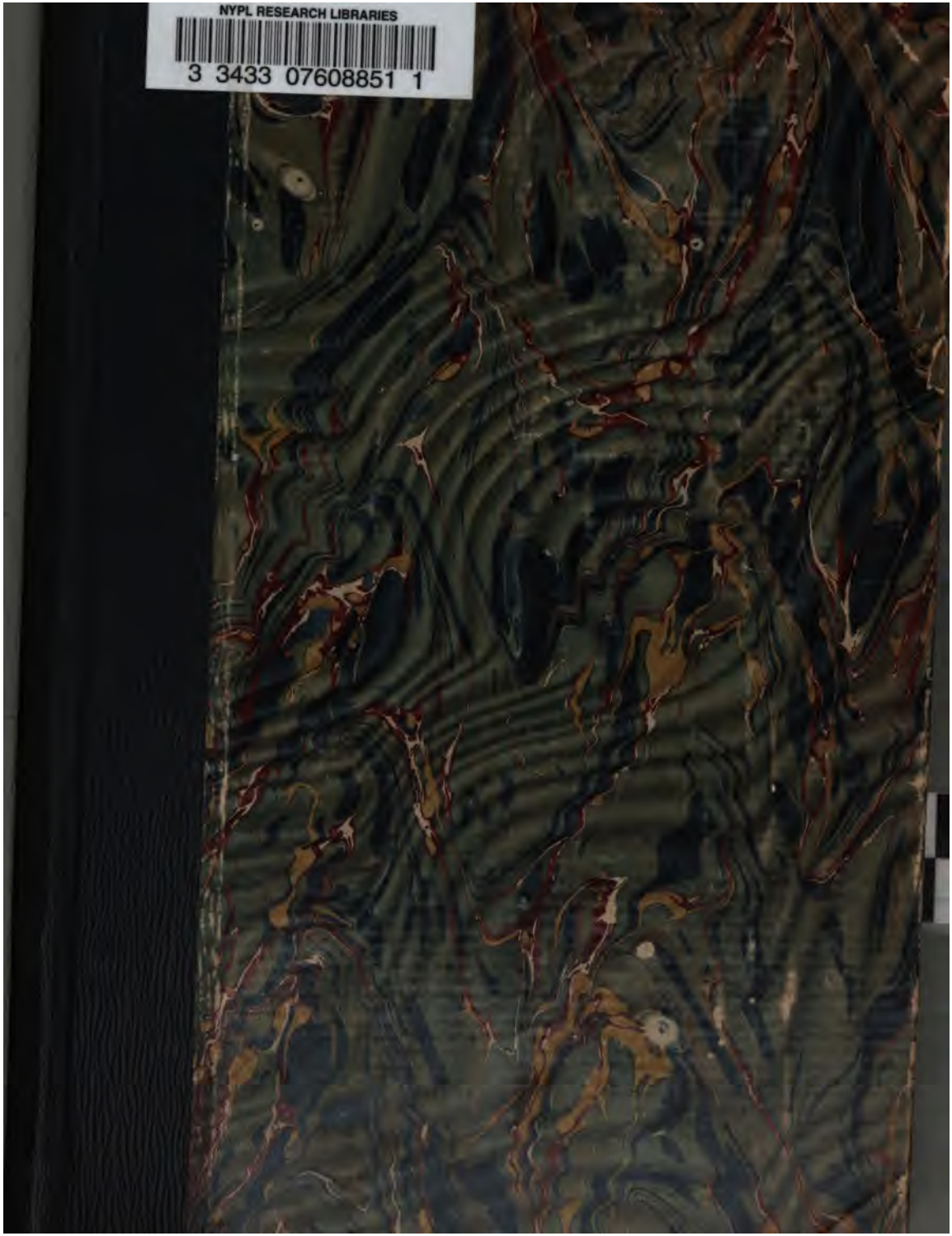

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"Who is this lady of whom——?"

Frontispiece—Celibacy

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CELIBACY

A Novel

BY

LEON R. JACOBS

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TO
MY MOTHER

THE AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

TO MY READERS AND THE CRITICS

In presenting a work of this character to the general public I realize how easily I may be either misunderstood or misconstrued. It is therefore well to state briefly why and how I have planned and written it—what I have tried to do. First of all, I have no inflated literary pretensions. My aim has been to set forth in fiction form a grave and ever-debated, never-settled problem—that of the "married" and the "unmarried" relation. I have tried to tell a plain story of surpassing interest, plainly, with absolute fidelity to the actual happenings and personages upon which and whom my tale is based.

Let me say, further—as must be obvious to the discerning reader-student—that I have not even attempted to treat all the phases and colors which my plot allows and invites—which it even demands. My story is disassociated entirely from the sociological, economic, social and pathological considerations which

enter into the relations of a man and woman, whether living together inside the church door or outside it. It would, indeed, be manifestly impracticable, as regards my plan, to take up these multi-colored aspects, each possessing so much subtilty and importance.

In another work I may do this. At present I shall be pleased if my humble efforts result in the stimulation of thought, in awakening a tendency to sincerer, truer striving after real happiness—the most elusive thing in our world.

THE AUTHOR

New York, June 20, 1911.

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CELIBACY

CHAPTER I.

New York City lay baked, hot and moistless, under the torrid rays of an early summer sun.

During the past three weeks no rain had fallen. The sprinkling wagons had been working overtime, reinforced by those of private concerns, endeavoring to cool the streets and thoroughfares.

The temperature had mounted higher by jumps every day, and the Official Weather Forecast gave no hope of change or relief. Many were overcome in the streets.

But of all the sections of the city, no part felt it more than the crowded East Side and tenement thoroughfares. Inmates of the tenements did everything possible to keep cool. The fire escapes were slept on at night, and the children, barefooted, revelled in the water sprinkled on the baking pavements.

No one seemed to possess strength or ambition to work. In the lower sections of the city, in the financial and professional parts, all left their offices early and journeyed where cooler spots and fresher air prevailed.

CELIBACY

It was outside the Grand Central Station, 42d Street, of this early Saturday morning.

The hustle and bustle, scurrying of pedestrians, the clanging and noise of the cars all were typical of the metropolitan city. Everybody raced along, the perspiration flowing down their faces. And the Grand Central Station seemed to be the destination of a goodly number. Inside it was packed. People were running hither and thither, asking questions of this porter and that attendant.

The bellowing voice of the Announcer proclaimed:

" 'Syracuse Local', No. 45, leaves track 11 at 7:53—stops Poughkeepsie, Greendale, (Catskill Station) * *"

What a jam! Everyone seemed mad. In a body they made a rush for the gate at track 11. Hats were lost, clothes torn and feet stepped on.

And then the ticket collector and conductors roared:

"Easy, everyone; take it easy—don't push!"

Finally, again could be heard that stentorian voice loudly calling through the megaphone:

"All aboard for 'Syracuse Local,' track 11, 7:53; a-l-l a-b-o-a-r-d !"

And the gate closed.

As every movable body must eventually move, so finally, the train started with a sudden jerk, and everyone sighed relief that at last the journey had commenced.

Four hours later the train pulled into the small station on the east bank of the Hudson, and awaiting it was a miscellaneous crowd of people. The station platform was crowded. Young girls and boys, men

and women, porters and expressmen, and a local assortment of the country folks were there. Some to greet their sweethearts, some fathers and husbands, and others, the week-end allotment of summer vacationists. What a craning of necks and waving of kerchiefs!

Down the station platform could be heard the shouts of the hackmen, telling you they would drive you to such and such a hotel, or cottage so and so, or any of the number of other places of refuge, until you didn't know where you'd go if you hadn't previously arranged. And then the baggagemen and boys molested and pestered you until you felt as though you'd rather give your grip or bag away, and leave your trunk to the mercies of the railroad than take the trouble of handing it over, having it delivered at another time than when you wanted, and then being mulcted seventy-five cents or a dollar for taking it to your hotel a half mile away.

To reach the other side of the river it is necessary to go by way of the ferryboat which meets all trains. So you board it and the first real pleasure of country travelling arrives. What a quaint ferryboat! An engineer, pilot and conductor constitute the entire staff necessary to the operation of the river service. The boat is as large as a good size catboat, and if the Hudson should suddenly take it upon itself to become rough with tides, the boat would be no more.

As the ferryboat backed out of its slip on its way to recross the river in time to connect with the next train a young woman could be seen impatiently walking

was where all the business for ten miles around was transacted.

At last they came to the end of the street, reached another hill and turned in on the road before them. On the jaded horse walked up to and under the West Shore bridge spanning high over head. And they continued on around still another turn in the road and up a third hill, yet the steepest of all. The horse, seemingly ready to drop at any moment, slowly picked its way up to the high ground in the distance.

Finally they reached a high eminence, and the young woman within the conveyance forgot her apparent anxiety and nervousness to admire nature's beauty. It was indeed a sight! Here the view of the surrounding country was magnificent with its long stretches of fertile land and large trees covering an expanse entirely green, with hills and lower ground, such as one encounters riding on a Coney Island toboggan with the breezes blowing a cool, refreshing air. The sole occupant was unaccustomed to the holes and bumps of the country roadway and expected momentarily to be thrown out of the vehicle to the ground. However, after bearing the conditions as well as she could, feeling as though every bone was broken and sore all over, the horse turned into the road and passed under an arch over which hung a sign: "The Inn."

And so they came upon the outer grounds of The Inn which lay spacious and level before them, and rolled easily over the crushed stone driveway leading to the large steps at the entrance.

The young woman again became visibly nervous, the expression of her face telling of her timidity and possible doubt. A liveried boy came running down the steps to assist the occupant with her bag. With a turning of the head and a glance here and there, she stepped to the desk. She asked, "Can you please tell me, sir, whether Mr. Robert A. Benton is stopping here?"

She was nervous and she seemed to be looking around as if expecting someone she knew.

The clerk answered, "Yes—Mr. Benton is stopping here."

For a moment the young woman noted the entry of "R. A. Benton and Wife."

Her thoughts were interrupted by the voice of the clerk again inquiring in a kindly tone: "Will you register M——?"

"Could you please tell me whether Mr. Benton is in?" and, continuing, murmurs: "I am—Mr. Benton's wife."

"No, he is not in, but if you wish, you may go right up to your rooms," said the clerk. He stopped for a moment and called "Front. Take Mrs. Benton to her rooms—suite 70—third floor."

a few moments ago, Mr. Benton, and I directed her to your rooms."

"Do you know whether she is upstairs now?" questioned the young man.

"I believe she is."

* * * * *

Above in suite 70, on the third floor, our young lady of former acquaintance, sat comfortably in a large Morris chair, with an open letter before her.

What could cause the look of doubt in her eyes? Possibly the contents of the letter. We move to her side and bending over her shapely shoulders and breathing the perfume which permeates throughout the room, glance upon the sheet, and follow her as she again re-reads it:

"Buffalo, N. Y.,————

My own dearest:—

I am through here with business and am leaving for Albany, where I intend to spend an hour or two attending to other matters. Then, I will be ready for the return to the city. How glad I'll be! To see you again! But I have thought of another arrangement, and I am writing you about it.

Owing to the season of the year and the fact that I pass through Catskill on my way home, and cannot resist the temptation of stopping off at that place, I intend to spend a few days again with Rip Van Winkle and his home.

The haunts and memories of the days spent in the past are calling me, and I hear the Katydid and Locust and Cricket; the temptation is too strong, and I have not the strength to deny them, so I am going again to those spots where we have spent so many pleasant hours in the past, whiled away in days of yore, and I want you to come too.

I must pass through 'Snake Alley,' where the stories are told of live reptiles; down over the winding road to the spring, where we drank its cool refreshing water, which

seemed to exhilarate me as though 'twere wine; on further to the wonderous large uprooted tree that spread its branches high over the shaded road, and onward to the stone, showing where the Indian's trail to Canada and the Northwest passed during the trying days of the American Revolution; and still onward to the Glen where we used to spend those quiet summer days, letting our feet hang over the rocks into the water, all so cool and refreshing.

Ah, what memories! And these are calling me.

Won't you meet me there, dear? I know you will enjoy the reunion, as I know I will.

I intend leaving Albany on Saturday, arriving at Catskill during the morning of that day. If you will leave New York the same morning by the 7:53 train, I will meet the train on its arrival about noon.

Hoping you will join me, and with the pleasure already anticipated, I am, as ever,

Yours,

Bob."

He had disappointed her! Had failed to meet her! Of course, she knew that he was at the hotel inasmuch as she was told so by the clerk.

No wonder she sat quiet and motionless: as though carved of stone. There seemed to be but one sign of life in her, and that existed in those beautiful eyes that seemed ready to break into tears any moment. They seemed to possess a mixture of anxiety, doubt, pain and regret.

She was suddenly disturbed by the sound of steps approaching in the hallway. Then there came a knock.

The tension was great! Springing from the chair, every muscle telling of the suspense at last broken, she faintly cried:

"Come in."

though to remind Audrey of the object of his visit.

"All right, dear, I am ready," she answered.

* * * * *

About the time that the foregoing scene was being enacted upstairs, another of somewhat interesting nature might have been witnessed downstairs. A young couple were standing before the desk, apparently anxious to secure accommodations. Finally, the clerk having finished with another patron, approached the young couple.

"Have you accommodations for two—an adjoining suite with bath?" the gentleman nervously inquired, all the while his companion nervous and blushing.

"Yes, I believe I can accommodate you, sir," answered the clerk in his most polite manner..

As the young man was about to register, he shot a glance from the corner of his eye to the girl by his side, and replied: "Mr. and Mrs. J. N. Church." "Show this gentleman and lady to suite No. 79—third floor," and handed the key to the apartment.

If the new guests had lingered a moment or two, they might have been amused by the very matter of fact remark of the clerk to the cashier, a pretty little brunette: "Well, Bess, I guess we've got a bridal couple with us to-day." And they might have been curious to know the reason of the cashier's answer: "Why is it, Joe, that bridal couples are the only ones to attract your attention and cause you to pass some remark?"

"Well, Madeline, dear, we are here at last, and away from all the curious—aren't you happy, dear?"

She looked up at him and as they kissed again, she answered: "Yes I am, love—but do you know I felt awfully embarassed when we stood at the desk downstairs and the clerk inquired for our names."

"How silly of you, dear. Don't worry, you will become accustomed to your position after a while," said he. "One naturally feels somewhat embarrassed in such a situation, especially so when it is the first time. But when you become accustomed to your environment, you will wonder that such a feeling should have ever disturbed you."

His words calmed her. She looked up and with a smile, said: "I suppose you're right, dear. Yet, we can't get away from facts. I was certainly quite embarrassed just the same." And then she cried with delight: "Aren't these rooms delightful—why I think these are the identical rooms I occupied last summer. I'm sure we'll enjoy our stay."

CHAPTER III.

The day was beautiful, clear and cool; the birds were singing; it seemed as though the whole world was happy. The sun shone from a clear blue sky through the tree tops, and a refreshing breeze stirred the branches. How beautiful the azure sky so far overhead appeared! Not a cloud blurred its clearness. Such a day poets have named the bridal of the earth and sky. It had rained the night before, and the hot dust of the country lanes and roads lay packed under foot.

Along the outskirts of The Inn grounds ran a short lane, called Jefferson Avenue. It was covered completely by magnificent trees of majestic heights with branches spreading far. Always a quiet place, Jefferson Avenue seemed to-day to be unusually still. Under Nature's archway a young couple came strolling along, apparently quite oblivious to the world outside. They came to a turn in the road showing a steep incline to the lane so well known and called: "Snake Alley."

A sudden movement and the young woman released her arm from within his and as though it were an awakening, she cried:

"Oh, here we are at 'Snake Alley'," and as her companion replied: "Yes, we are," she continued thoughtfully:

"I wonder, Bob, whether these snakes everyone so often speaks of really exist. Let's see if we can find one."

So they returned and followed the road and down "Snake Alley" they strolled. They finally reached the end of the Alley without finding snake or any other reptile.

That they had enjoyed the excitement of it all could be plainly seen by their flushed faces and burning eyes, and as they turned into the long and winding road which continued at the end of the Alley, Audrey cried in ecstasy:

"Oh, Bob, wasn't it fine!" and he answered with much delight and joy:

"Yes, Audrey, it was fine—it always is when you are here," and taking her in his arms he kissed her warmly on the cheek.

"Now—Bob—behave yourself. Suppose someone came strolling along and saw you," she remonstrated with him playfully, notwithstanding a slight glance from one of her eyes in her most tempting manner, for which she was punished by Bob with another kiss in the same place and a tighter hug. Finally he released his hold and looking her in the eye, he replied with warmth:

"Now, Audrey, don't you worry about anyone seeing us—in the first place, we can hear them coming—and in the second, I wouldn't care."

"Oh, very well, Bob. I never can make you feel as though you had committed an indiscretion or done anything out of the way, no matter what I complain of. You seem to enjoy my reprimands. So I suppose it would be useless for me to say any more."

"The trouble with you, Audrey, is that you always think it wrong, and sometimes I think it is more from design than anything else that you complain . . . I wonder," he spoke slowly and thoughtfully, at the same time smiling, as though speaking to himself, "I wonder. . . whether the last scolding had a motive. If I could feel sure I'd punish you with another." And then he hastened to say, as he looked at her and found her smiling: "In fact, I am inclined to do it anyway." And he again caught her in his arms and pressed her to him. And so he kissed her again and again, as he cried with joy: "I thought so." She continued to smile and looking him lovingly in the eyes, she lay limp in his arms.

A minute or two and then she moved from his embrace.

"Let us go on to the spring and the large uprooted tree, Bob, where you took a picture of Madeline and myself last summer . . . . she and I sitting near the roots." And he answered as though he wished to remind her of the object of the journey.

"Why, Audrey, that is where we're going. . . you don't suppose I asked you to come here without paying a visit to all those places which bring back so many pleasant memories of the days gone by . . . do you?"

So on they strolled as two lovers, down the road, past the old country farm-house with its pear and apple trees. They stopped to pick an apple and a pear, only to find after biting into them, that they were yet unripe.

A little later they arrived in view of the compact road, far off on the right side of which was located the spring. . . Nature's gift.

"There it is, Audrey . . . . . the same old spring." And as they stood gazing at it, he soliloquized: "Nothing changed. . . it seems to me that these old places never wear. . . that time makes no impression." She answered: "It does seem so, Bob, don't it? There is not a change in or around the place that I can see."

Drawing from his pocket his traveling cup, now a veteran of service, Bob dipped the cup in the clear, cool, pure water, flowing so tranquilly in the spring.

Each drained the cup of its contents, and then continued on their way.

Just beyond was a slight turn in the wood. Bob came to a stop and looking on the right of the road, with the trees and bushes along the narrow and winding footpath further on, he turned to Audrey, and pointing ahead, he whispered, as he took her hand:

"There dear, is a spot that I shall always cherish and love . . . it means so much . . . that is where we really first learned to know each other. . . .I shall always remember it . . . won't you, Audrey?"

He held her hand; she looked up at him with eyes that to him meant so much; she sighed—so did he. They were happy; but she was thinking—of what it would be hard to tell—yet they must have been pleasant thoughts, for she continued to gaze in his eyes plaintively. Her cheeks were overspread by a rosy blush. She murmured to him and he heard the words:

"Yes . . . Bob . . . I .. remember. . . shall I ever forget!"

They clambered up the side of the hill and disappeared within the shrubbery.

A little later they were strolling lightly along the road. A short distance in front of them they saw "The old tree." How majestically it stood by the side of the road! As it came within sight, they cried in unison, as they pointed to it: "There it is."

Up to the tree they went where once they climbed, and around to the spot where they had sat so often before.

"Oh, Bob, look! There is corn growing there now. Last year it was all grass and flowers . . . and now! . . . We can't sit here as we used to," Audrey sighed with regret. The thought seemed to momentarily sadden her.

"Yes, I see, Audrey, but it don't make much difference. Of course, we can't sit and enjoy this fine old tree as we used to, but we can look around and admire the spot," he replied almost resignedly. The effect on him of the passing of a portion of the landscape did not seem to be so pronounced as on Audrey.

Down again they climbed and out on to the road; and walked slowly, admiring the scene of the valley below stretching before them, till soon they came to the stone slab which marked the old Indian trail to Canada and the Northwest. To this spot of memory they gave but a passing thought and glance. They continued on until they came within sight of the high cliff which bordered the tracks. They knew they were near the Glen, and as they approached they heard its waters rushing over the rocks and stones.

Audrey's face lighted with joy, and she cried:

"Oh, Bob, do you hear the Glen? Isn't it just too lovely, dear? It seems to have such a strange and weird effect. I am so happy; I could live here all my life. It's paradise," she exclaimed.

They clambered down and over the ruined Glen, saw the old mill wheel which in its days of purpose and labor, had been the means of power and motion, and wandered on to the tremendous large rocks and boulders which skirted the vale. Then they sat on a large rock to rest.

"Isn't it fine, Audrey?" Bob cried. His face was glowing with the thrill of it all. "Come ahead, off

with shoes and stockings and let our feet hang over the rock and revel in the coolness of the waters as they rush by," he concluded as he untied the strings of her tiny oxfords.

"I'm with you, Bob," replied Audrey in ecstasy, suiting the action to the words.

So they sat, side by side, deep in thought, with a stillness within them, apparently thinking of—well —let the reader guess, if possible. Not a word escaped them. Possibly they were thinking of how often they had done the same before; possibly of the world they knew they must soon return to and therefore with the regret that they could not live on forever amid such environment; of the relief they felt that they were away from the heat and dust of a hot city; of what their future might be.

The minutes flew by, and the sun could be seen gradually sinking in the West, as they continued to sit in silence. The afternoon was passing. They must return to The Inn in time to dress for dinner. Finally Audrey, with her arms about Bob's neck, whispered to him:

"Aren't we just the silliest of children? Here we sit with our shoes and stockings off and our feet hanging over the rock into the water—just like children." She must have been happy in the thought that she could be a child again and enjoy a child's pleasures. "Come Bob, haven't we had enough?" and then she seemed to grow suddenly sad and her words which followed explained the reason. "Yet, I am so happy I really don't want

to go away. But I suppose I must—we must." And then she grew sprightly and joyful again. "So get along, dear. Let the sun dry our feet first and then we'll dress," she laughingly cried. "It will take us quite some time to reach The Inn, and the sun is already sinking low in the west, and we've got to dress for dinner, too. So let us get along now, dear," she concluded as she kissed him.

At last, tired and foot sore and dusty, but happy and contented, they reached the outer boundary of The Inn grounds which skirted the Heights Hotel on the corner. They crossed the roadway and as they did, looking before them, they noticed a couple strolling, arm in arm.

"Bob," inquired Audrey perplexed, "Do you notice the couple in front of us, don't they seem familiar to you? I can't just place them."

"Yes, they are, Audrey; I can't seem to recognize them either," replied Bob, looking ahead of him. "Let's hurry on and catch up with them; we'll know quickly enough then."

As they turned in under the archway of the Inn, they came face to face with the couple. They apparently had stopped to admire the flowers which grew so luxuriantly along the side of The Inn grounds. Before either could recover from the surprise and shock of the meeting, a voice exclaimed in a tone which told of the equal surprise of its owner:

"Audrey!"

And Audrey almost stammering the words replied:

"Madeline—Church!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Inn at six o'clock in the evening was a sort of reproduction of fashionable New York.

"Fair women and brave men" were everywhere to be seen, attired in evening clothes of the smartest vogue. It seemed as though silks and satins must be too expensive for the lady guests, for above the waist there was but little fabric to be seen! Nature's clothes were all. This bareness was especially enticing to those who knew little of such life, and many a male bosom gave way to voluptuous emotions.

In the distance could be heard the sweet, soothing notes of the string orchestra, which greeted the guests as they strolled in the corridors or entered the dining hall.

Of the many couples, young and old, maids and matrons, youths and elders, there was one couple which seemed to attract the special attention of the guests. Oblivious to this attention, they strolled, arm in arm, toward the dining room, speaking only to another couple that accompanied them.

CELIBACY

THE WOMAN—she could hardly be so called, so young and apparently unaccustomed to the gaiety and rude display of it all—many an artist would have given his life to protray, thoroughly satisfied that no more beautiful picture could be found. That she was little past her majority was plain. Dark complexioned—a typical and striking brunette—with hair that seemed to glisten under the lights which shone down upon them and curl and curl into a maze over her classic head; a skin so white, without mark or wrinkle, rouge or powder; eyes that glowed and burned like small suns; a body so shapely, a Venus only could vie with it; such and far more was the woman who attracted all eyes. The gown adorning nature's beauty was also exquisite. It was as white as the satiny skin of its wearer, trimmed with absolute simplicity. The neck which showed so clear and shapely was encircled with a narrow band of black velvet; the arms were slender from shoulder to wrist, adorned with plain gold bracelets so becoming to them.

THE MAN—for every inch of him he was—standing six foot, with shoulders broad and firm; a face as though chiseled by a sculpter; Roman in every feature; dark complexioned as was the woman by whose side he walked and a carriage withal that seemed to speak of strength of purpose and will, a ruler of men—a man of honor—a manly man.

As they were being seated at the table reserved for them, Bob exclaimed:

"I'm famished," and the others signified laughingly their entire concurrence with his gastronomic sentiments.

The dining room was beautifully decorated with lights and flowers.

"Isn't this indeed a lovely scene, Jesse? Isn't it just too lovely?" cried Madeline, in ecstasy. She had seen the same dining room in former years with very little change from what it was now, but it seemed that it always held her by its charm.

"Yes, Madeline you are right; it's magnificent. I've dined at many a hotel and restaurant—even in New York—but there are very few the equal of the one we have here," he answered earnestly.

"You're right there, Jesse. This dining room beats them all; in all New York there isn't one that I enjoy so much as this one," remarked Bob, joining in the discussion.

"Yes, there is no question as to its beauty, and besides, its effect is so soothing, so to speak; the partial dimness seems to take one away from the every-day life of noise and brightness, and place one in dreamland," agreed Audrey half dreamily.

Bob looked mischievously at Audrey and with a smile and a wink he followed up her remark as to the "dreaminess" of the scene by saying:

"I don't think Madeline and Jesse will object to that sentiment Audrey, especially now and to-night, eh? I guess, as far as they're concerned, they're in heaven anyhow without any outside decorations. You see they're on their honeymoon and that's

supposed to be the happiest moment in one's life; it must be."

Blushing a crimson red and seeming shy and embarrassed, Madeline interrupted him, as though to object to Bob's remarks:

"Now Bob, stop—none of that—we can do without."

And Jesse to help her along, also reddening, chimed in:

"Don't rub it in old boy; we all expect some day to become 'benedicts.'"

For a moment Bob's face went pale and sadness shone in his eyes. Sitting up in his chair, he smilingly replied:

"I guess you're right, Jesse, but I could not restrain myself from letting you have it when the opportunity came so easily," and he continued somewhat resignedly, looking at Audrey with thoughts, the nature of which possibly he assumed: "Possibly sometime, somewhere, I too, may be in just the same happy mood."

It could easily be seen that both Madeline and Jesse were ideally happy and possibly their appearance caused Bob to remark as he did. He may have felt somewhat jealous of their felicity.

"I do wish you boys would cease this sentimental rubbish. You talk as though you were the only ones living. Don't we girls feel the same?" Audrey answered intending to console. "And now just think of Madeline and me. Ever since we were children —yes, as far back as I can remember—we have al-

ways been together, always shared the same pleasures and joys, sorrows and disappointments. We were never apart. What Madeline did, I did; where Madeline went, I went; yes, we were the same almost in being." And then she seemed to speak as though she was about to lose something: "And won't we be changed now? I loved her and still love her—for what she is; but now she has someone else to love her and possibly my love will be forgotten. She won't be the same as she has always been. Times have changed; things are different; she will go her way and I must mine," murmured Audrey, her eyes filled with pain but for a moment more to bring a flood of tears.

The boys said nothing. Possibly she had spoken a prophecy for the future. That she had spoken truly of their past they knew for a fact. But it was Madeline who was quick to remark:

"Now Audrey, you're talking rubbish and nonsense. I'll never forget you and I'll be the same. We shall share our joys and sorrows together as in the days gone by." And then turning to Jesse, she sweetly said, half inquiringly and partly as though it were a statement of fact: "Won't we, dear?"

"You certainly will; I shall think it a crime to separate you girls and therefore I will never think of such a thing—for to me you will always be 'the girls'," he answered as he looked at Madeline who was sweetly smiling at him. And then he turned to Bob and as if to verify what he had said, he inquired of him, "Isn't that so, Bob?"

"I certainly hope so," Bob answered, but there seemed to be in the tone of his voice a doubt as to the truth of the fact and so he continued, "And you know, Jesse, when a woman marries she is not as free and independent as she was before that time. She has more cares and tribulations, and her time is taken up with her home. Yes, I suppose if she is a good friend—not the friend of to-day, as friends go—she will be able to find, at least, a little time to devote to her friends," he concluded.

"Don't think so badly of me, Bob," said Madeline; "the least I thought to expect from you was to give me a little credit for remembering my friends anyway." And then she continued as though a new thought had come into her mind: "I was thinking just before coming down to supper, while dressing, what a joyful reunion this meeting would be. We could all take in together those places hereabout where we used to while away our time," and then with the joy of it all anticipated, lighting up her face, she concluded enthusiastically, "And really, I can hardly wait until to-morrow to come to make the trip."

"I am awfully sorry Madeline, but Bob and I took the trip this afternoon on our arrival." And then to explain why they had done so, she went on: "Of course, we didn't expect to meet you or we would have waited for you; and you may know that we've got to return to the city to-morrow night. However, dear, I will be happy to do it again—and I'm sure Bob will," Audrey concluded.

"So will I," joined in Bob. "You know," addressing all, "I could live here all my life and would ask for nothing better. City life I don't give a rap of my fingers for."

"Oh, rats, Bob, forget it. How you could live such a stupid life as this, I can't imagine. It might be all right to spend a month or two here in the summer for recreation and health, but to spend one's life in this environment—I guess not. What's come over you, Bob—are you getting to be a 'dreamer'?" Jesse argued.

The girls just smiled at each other; they knew what was coming; they had heard a similar argument before. So they simply sat and waited for what they knew must come.

"No, Jesse, I am not a 'dreamer.' But if you can show me what there is in city life that's worth anything, you're a good one. I've spent all my life in the city—yes, I was born there—I've gone around, seen all there's to be seen and for the life of me I can't see what's in it. It's a case of hustle and bustle all day long, then home, then out again to that never ceasing round of pleasures, until either your head is ready to split or you're so tired you can't stand. And that's what you call life, is it, Jesse? Well, it may be one kind of life, but it certainly isn't the kind I would choose if I had my choice. Why, here take me for example. There is only one thing in this life that I want and yet I can't get. I've got all the money I want and with all my money do you think I am really happy?

Give me my little home in the country where I can live my own way in my own time and in my own style; where I could earn my living by tilling the soil or any other way if it were necessary; that's what I'd like and I'd do it to-morrow," Bob argued with heat and conviction. It could easily be seen that the two men were as different in their ideas of life as the earth from the sky.

So Jesse listened to what he had heard and then he replied:

"Well, I suppose it depends upon the man; there are some, who I guess, couldn't live a city life and others who wouldn't a country life. And I guess I must belong to the latter class. To live a country life all year round would drive me to an insane asylum."

"I don't object to you boys arguing that question all night," said Audrey, "but I do wish you wouldn't forget that Madeline and I are waiting for our coffee and that it is getting cold."

As Bob poured the coffee in the cups, he accidentally over-turned Audrey's cup, spilling its contents on her gown. The waiter, who was standing close by, quick to find opportunities to earn a large tip, stepped up to Audrey and in his smoothest and politest manner, inquired respectfully:

"Is there anything I can do for you, *Mrs. Benton?*" Audrey looked up, turned color slightly, and in a low even tone replied:

"I guess not, waiter. I guess not; it is really nothing."

The moment that Audrey and Bob had looked forward to for sometime and knew must come to pass, had arrived, and they were aware that nothing less than a full explanation of the conditions of things so innocently disclosed by the waiter would suffice for their friends. But how to begin! They had discussed the probability of their secret becoming known, and even more so, the knowledge that sooner or later, it must become public property. They realized that the subject would be argued and talked about by all their friends. Audrey had suggested that all explanations and answers to questions be referred to her.

Audrey was thinking fast. What was she to do? She knew that her friends were anxiously and curiously awaiting her words. But none came. She expected every minute an outburst from Madeline. She knew that she could not have told her friend before,though she ought to have. They were dear friends and knew each other's thoughts and life. Her friend was about to be married.

And then she heard Madeline's voice; it seemed far away, and as though she were mocking and upbraiding her for her faithless belief in her and lack of confidence.

Madeline and Jesse were quick to scent a possible romance and elopement. The former looked at the latter and the latter at the former, and then they both glanced at Audrey and Bob. It was for Madeline to break the silence. So in astonishment and surprise, which certainly wasn't acted for the

occasion, but was really sincere, she said, in a somewhat bantering tone:

"Oh, so it's Mrs. Robert A. Benton now, is it? You unfaithful and distrustful friend, you wouldn't tell me, would you? You know, Mrs. Benton, every secret will out sooner or later." And then she continued as though to reprimand and at the same time apparently feeling that she had been neglected:

"You're a nice one, aren't you, Audrey? Only a few moments ago you were charging me with forgetting you in the future and here I find you forgetting me in the present. Keeping secrets from me—from me—just imagine and your dearest friend. Well, really I can't get over it."

And then for a moment there was silence. Still blanching under the hot fire of Madeline's remarks and the awkward situation, Audrey answered, "If Madeline, you would get over it, as you say, for a minute or two, and give me a chance, possibly I'd try to tell you about it, now that the secret is one no longer. I intended to tell you anyway, but I'll admit, just *when* I hadn't decided; now let us finish our coffee and send the boys out to smoke their cigars; then we'll go to our room and I'll tell you all about it."

"All right, Audrey, I am just crazy to hear your story," Madeline replied.

And then Jesse chimed in as though he didn't intend to be left out: "And so am I."

But Bob said nothing; he simply sat still and gazed in front of him. What thoughts were passing

through his mind would be difficult at this time to say.

"Now dear, you take a stroll with Bob", Audrey said to Jesse, "and smoke your cigars, and then come back later. I suppose Bob will tell you all about it, while you're gone." She kissed him.

Madeline took Audrey with her in the direction of the elevator. The men retired to the veranda of The Inn. They were about to go down the steps when Jesse, slapping Bob on the back, demanded:

"So you were rubbing it in a short time ago, eh? Who's the shoe on now? Now Bob, I want to hear all about it. Let me have it, no frills, no buts and ands and hows, but plain facts. Understand?" And then he poked Bob again in the ribs.

Bob turned toward him, looked him fully in the face, and with the least bit of a smile playing on his countenance, rejoined:

"Jesse, I can't say a word. I promised Audrey that should the situation arise, I would give her the opportunity of explaining everything. In fact, she said she wanted the pleasure of doing so. And you know how girls are. If they want anything, why we boys generally see that they get it. Whether we're foolish enough in so doing I don't know. What it is that causes us to do it, I am equally in the dark about it. But the fact is there. So don't ask me anything more. Wait until we return and you'll hear all about it."

Jesse couldn't understand. Of course, he knew the whims and fancies of young girls, but for the

life of him he couldn't possibly see what serious objection there was in Bob telling him what he knew Audrey would tell him later, yet Bob had spoken so determinedly that he was sure that no amount of persuasions would cause him to change his mind. So he resignedly replied: "Well, I must say that's pretty tough, Bob. In this respect I am almost as curious as a woman. I would like to know all about it, but I suppose I've got to wait."

They strolled in silence, smoking their cigars.

CHAPTER V.

As they shot upward in the elevator, Audrey's face was a study. Madeline's was just the contrary; she was light, free and in a happy mood, possibly from the feeling that she had come upon a secret and that that secret was now to be told her.

Arriving in the room, Madeline, with joy, threw her arms around Audrey's neck and was about to speak, when Audrey spoke—the tone of her voice possessing a harshness and sharpness which Madeline felt she had never heard before.

"No, Madeline you must not do this—I'm not what you think I am—*Bob and I are not married.*"

For a moment, Madeline could hardly believe her ears; she still clung to her; she didn't understand; then realizing the full meaning of what Audrey had said, she dropped her arms from around Audrey's neck, and her face, paler than Audrey had ever seen before, Madeline cried out two words; they seemed to speak volumes:

" Madeline cried out two words; they seemed to speak volumes."

P. 36 – Celibacy

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"Audrey Chittenden!"

And then womanlike, she burst into tears.

So they remained. Madeline with head bowed in her hands; Audrey standing as though made of stone. Fully ten minutes ticked slowly away, and yet not a sign of life showed in the two beautiful beings within the room except the labored breathing of the one and the relieved sobs of the other. Finally, as though it were better to have done with it all now than later, Audrey spoke:

"Now listen dear. I don't know whether you want anything to do with me now that I've told you what I've done. Yet I would like you to know why I have taken this step. Not by way of apology or in extenuation, but merely to explain. After," she paused as though under great stress, "we can part and each go our own way." For a moment Madeline said nothing. She simply thought, then looking up at Audrey, with a sadness entirely genuine and with a tone soothing and gentle she cried:

"Oh, Audrey dear, you needn't think I'll leave you now—now more than ever I'll stand by you; but dear, why didn't you come to me first and confide in me as you always have done, before you took this step. I'm sure you wouldn't have done this thing then. Bob is a fine fellow, and I know he's most hon——"

"Please, Madeline, don't mention Bob's name. He is not to blame. I have done this because I think it's for the best," interrupted Audrey.

And Madeline continued as though she had not heard the interruption:

"—honorable, and he would have married you at a word. I know he loves you, and I feel sure you love him." And then she went on as though stating the fact: "You've always told me so, haven't you, dear?"

Audrey stared out of the window and sat still. She seemed to be thinking.

"Yes, I do love him—more than my very life," Audrey murmured, and if her eyes could speak the love she felt there would be no reason to doubt her words.

Her friend looked at her with an expression of surprise in her eyes. She could not understand. Love a man, and not marry him? That was too much. Then Audrey heard her remonstrate with her:

"Then why such outrageous and unnatural behavior, Audrey? You must have been insane to have done this. I really thought better of you."

Then Madeline heard her friend answer:

"Madeline, I think I have spoken to you before on this subject, and you know how I feel." They must have conversed before and she endeavored to remind her friend of the fact.

"I know," admitted Madeline, "but I didn't believe you were serious. I thought you were only discussing the subject for the purpose of arguing it; not that you had any idea of using it personally."

"Well, you know now; in fact, I have never been

more serious." Audrey intended that there should exist no doubt any longer. Then she continued earnestly: "My future happiness means much to me, Madeline, and I fear that that can only be assured me by the life I intend to lead."

"But Audrey dear, how can you be really happy if you are going to live such a life?" Madeline argued.

And she was quickly answered by Audrey: "It is just this way of living that I have chosen that I am sure will give me happiness—that is as sure as I am of anything that the future will bring."

"Really I can't understand you. You say you love Bob more than your life. Do you think he will love you when he learns how you intend to live?" answered Madeline. She was endeavoring to persuade her friend that Bob wouldn't approve.

"That's just it—he will love me—he'll love me the more and what's more, will always love me, too," replied Audrey, happy in the thought of Bob's love.

"I really can't understand you Audrey. I can't understand," replied Madeline in a murmur.

"Listen, Madeline," Audrey replied, "And I will try to illustrate to you. Did you ever see a thing that you could have for the asking, or more, possess by simply holding out your hand? Tell me, did you care much about it, or were you anxious to hold it?" she concluded inquiringly.

"No. I must admit, those things I could easily obtain or those I possessed after a while I cared little or nothing about," admitted Madeline. She

very likely was thinking how often that same feeling of indifference had possessed her.

"Now, was there ever anything you wanted and very badly, too, and that you could not obtain? Tell me, did you try very hard to get it?"

"Y-e-s," replied Madeline, for a second time brought to remember possibly some former similar situation.

"Do you understand now?" insisted Audrey.

"Yes, but this is so different, Audrey. Oh, how different. It is ridiculous to compare this thing with the ordinary things we see and want in life," persisted Madeline. She was trying to show her friend that the illustration might easily apply to a less important matter in life, but it was too ridiculous to compare with the question of one's moral conduct.

"No it isn't, Madeline. *It is just because I love Bob so deeply I won't marry him,* as I said before," replied Audrey. And then there came into her eyes a look of fear. It must have been the thought of a possibility of what she was about to say. "It would break my heart if he should cast me aside or forget me," she weakly concluded.

And then her friend thought she saw and had discovered her weakness. She replied: "That's just what he will do Audrey." And in a coaxing and enticing way, she continued. "If you marry him, then of course he wouldn't and couldn't cast you off. He'd be tied to you. Only death could separate you."

And Audrey replied almost pitying the lack of experience and knowledge apparent in her friend's remarks:

"Yes, that's just it. If I would marry him, he would then know that I belonged to him. I was his wife and he need have no fear that he would lose me. Then, that way he would soon lose this feeling of uncertainty and being assured of his absolute possession would, to a degree, become indifferent to me." Audrey had spoken emphatically.

Madeline's face lighted up. A thought came to her. She was sure now that she could show her friend how mistaken an idea she possessed.

"If such a condition arose in making life unbearable the law would step in and relieve you of the burden and misery of an unhappy married life. You could divorce him." And then another thought seemed to come to her mind for she continued: "And then wouldn't you be happy? With the love of your child, Audrey; wouldn't the off-spring, your flesh and blood, your baby; wouldn't it be a balm to your aching heart to make you happy?" Madeline concluded. She could say no more.

Disgust was written on Audrey's face; her eyes burned; she had waited patiently for her friend to come to an end; she could hardly wait for her to stop so moved was she.

"Yes, more misery," cried Audrey. "What, wreck another innocent life; what good are these divorces, anyway. I believe them an abomination—cruel, pitiless and hard, without feeling, without thought

of the future." And then she went on sarcastically: "You say I'd be happy with my child. But could I and would I obtain possession of it all the time; no, and you know it, and if you don't it's about time you did. The law which you speak of as an arbiter, a refuge, a means of backing out of a bargain you've sworn to keep until 'death do us part," would be the very means of making me miserable for the remainder of my life. You say the law would release me from Bob. Y-e-s, that may be so, but what a punishment it would inflict!" And then she went on breathless, her voice rising: "This sublime law, this righteous law, this majestic law, would grant the custody of my child—listen to me—my child, its mother—half the time to its father and the other half of the time to me. The law would rock this innocent child from one place to another; from one house to another; the child would have no home, that 'haven of rest' that is so dear to all of us. Can you imagine what that means? Can you picture the life of that child? Can you realize what that infant would become when it grew older; its education sadly neglected, its home teachings missing, thrown upon a cold and heartless world? Why Madeline, by the time that child had attained its majority I am afraid it would have been so pitched about its future forever would be darkened."

And still breathless, but determined, she continued:

"Madeline, you tell me to take consolation in that; if Bob was to care less for me, and I compelled to

resort to the law; far better would it be that we were tied together for the balance of our lives and be unhappy ourselves for we had brought the misery upon ourselves—and we should be punished—than to bring misfortune upon an innocent child. You know how truly I speak, Madeline, and I need say no more. I think the divorce laws are most unnatural, most iniquitous."

Audrey had risen to a fever. Her eyes blazed, her body swayed, her face crimson red under the enthusiasm and excitement of the discussion and her feeling toward a law which to her seemed outrageous. That the subject had taken entire possession of every fibre of her being was apparent.

For a moment Madeline could not reply. Words failed her. She didn't seem to have the strength to answer. She looked at Audrey as the latter stood in all her strength, in full possession of every faculty, with the fullness of health. Finally, pulling herself together, and with the hope of bringing home to Andrey the monstrocity of her plan of life, Madeline insisted:

"I think you exaggerate real life, dear. I am sure our mothers and fathers before us didn't look at life that way. They didn't think that they would care less for each other in the married state."

Audrey must have been waiting just this argument for she was quick to reply.

"Oh, Madeline we are not living in the day of our parents. We're living 'in the days of to-day';

and the times are different now. Things have changed. In those days a young couple could marry and live on little or nothing; then if a man earned twenty or twenty-five dollars a week, it was considered quite an income; they could live nicely on that; but to-day if that same man earns forty or fifty dollars weekly, he has nothing more to show for the increased income at the end of the week if he is to live in the same way, than he had years ago. Why to-day, figuratively speaking, we eat money. A fair income is realized, but the cost of living is so great that that income is entirely consumed. Let reverses come, illness fall upon us or some other misfortune, equally as bad, if not worse, and we are at a loss to know which way to turn in our troubles. We can't go to friends, for the chances are they wouldn't befriend us. In the days of our parents, one worked for another's good, favored one another and everyone lived for one another. But to-day that is not so. To-day we work for our own good; we care little for the misfortunes of others; we think of only ourselves, of self-preservation—even if that cost the ruin of others in satisfying our own selfish desires." And then Audrey continued on in the same vein: "It is so bad to-day that even intended husbands and wives are selfish as to each other." And as Madeline attempted to interrupt, she continued: "Now, let me show you Madeline, what I mean—mind you, I am not speaking of exceptions, for I don't intend to argue any questions by exceptions—take the young man of to-day; he

intends to marry. What's the first thing he thinks of? You know, I know—he's considering how much money —yes, how great a cash consideration he can secure from his intended father-in-law. And what is the intended father-in-law thinking of or the intended wife, what does she think of? Why they're considering how well the young man can support her. I tell you Madeline, it is nothing more or less than a simple bargain and sale—yes, an ordinary sale of cattle, that's all. And it is so with the rich or the poor; the big or the little. Here we have our American millionaires giving their beautiful educated daughters to worthless, sickly, scoundrel foreign titles. And it seems they glory in it and their daughters too. They're obtaining a title. She is going to be a Countess, or a Baroness or a Dutchess and have half a hundred other prefixes to her name, and so these American gentlemen who have labored hard for their fortunes and the chances are have taken it away from poorer and more deserving fellow citizens, give millions to these foreigners to marry their children. They call it a *dot.* Now Madeline, can you tell me how such a couple can be happy; they know with what object they marry each other: to better their positions either financially or socially; if they're real men and women they will, they must despise each other. I can't see how two such beings can ever love each other. Of course, they may not know what love is, and they may be happy in their possessions. But money is a thing we can't say we'll always have, so if they lose it, what then?"

Madeline could not help but look curiously at her friend. She wondered where she had obtained such ideas of modern life. She couldn't believe, for she knew little of that life, so she insisted: "Oh, I think you're wrong Audrey, you're speaking of isolated cases; the world isn't as bad as all that; the change isn't as great as all that."

"And as times change, so we must change our mode of living," continued Audrey. "And do you know, Madeline whom I blame for the situation more than anyone else?" she questioned her friend. "I blame the fathers and mothers of to-day more than anyone else—even more than the wheel of progress, or decline if you will. Sometimes I think the world is gradually declining morally and for good. Of course, we're growing bigger and wealthier, but what's that? Everything to-day is 'success' no matter what the cost or the method. And so if our fathers and mothers would, in the days now gone, have treated us fairer, that is, endeavored to obtain our confidence by talking to their children as we grew older year after year of things we could understand and appreciate; spoke to us of matters we should have known about; had been our friends —*friends,* not parents—the world of to-day would be far different, yes and far better; but no, they no doubt, considered us too young to know and too youthful to listen to what later we must know if we were to live happy in the future and be physically better. And so we were compelled to learn of these things from friends other than they—in

most instances, strangers in a way—and of course, then we learned things that was not learning, but on the contrary, obtained a knowledge that was misinformed and wrong." Audrey was going on as though she were sure of her argument. "What was the result? We were permitted to drift away from our parents, feeling as though we must hide things that it were better they knew, and at last when we became men and women—then it was too late. We had lived in experience—we could appreciate what it meant—but oh, at what a cost!" And then before concluding she hesitated for a second; "And Madeline while our parents are our greatest friends, yet there are times when our greatest friends are our greatest enemies," she cried.

The vehemence with which Audrey had spoken, full of so much apparent strength of conviction, so much heart feeling, left not only herself breathless, but found Madeline breathing fast. All the latter could do was to sit and ponder; think of the force, the truth of all that had been said by her friend; possibly she, too, felt that there was something to be studied; that there was something that she had forgotten, missed, neglected to seriously think of.

"Well, then, Audrey, assuming what you say is so, is that any reason why we should suffer for no reason of our own, because our parents, as you say, didn't teach us as you think they should have; why we should take up a life that eventually must become monstrous, when we have the opportunity of taking the places of our fathers and mothers, to

teach our children that which they should have taught theirs?" Madeline argued consistently.

"The trouble is, Madeline, it can't be done without misery, without a certain degree of, if not, entire failure," persisted Audrey. "As I said before the world is not what it used to be; everyone looks for himself first, and I'm afraid that that is what I intend to do—I feel I must do it; look to my own first—let others take care of themselves." And then she explained: "That is, only when my future is concerned; assistance I'll always favor others with," she concluded.

It seemed to Madeline that Audrey was learning to become selfish; yet she could not believe it. She had known Audrey too long.

"Oh, but I know you won't be happy, Audrey. I am sure you will regret it; possibly then it will be too late and your life will be wrecked. You see I know you so well. I know you want to some day become a mother. All women do; that's a woman's mission in life; that's what a real woman prays, craves and lives for—yes, and some, in their fight with nature, die for. You're no different from other women, good women, I know—we know, Audrey. Remember you're the daughter of your mother."

For a few minutes not a sound could be heard; Audrey sat in silence with bowed head and eyes which spoke that which the tongue could not. Her bosom rose and fell. A tear dropped on her heaving breast. Was she wavering in her determina-

tion, her belief, her future? Or was she trying to overcome the natural instinct of womanhood which had been so plainly spoken by her friend? Who can tell? And as she sat so quiet and thoughtful, Madeline watched, waited for some sign which would tell of her victory of the fight which she was waging for her friend's sake; whom she loved more dearly than life itself. And so they remained; minutes passed slowly by never to return, while here was being laid the future career of one, and who will gainsay, possibly two or more lives?

The scene was indeed a dramatic one and the moment a most vital and important one. That Audrey was passing through in her mind's eye scenes that she possibly hoped she might have played a part, that possibly the thought of in the past she had cherished, is a mooted question. But the liklihood of such being her thoughts was great. If such was the case, however, it will be readily appreciated how strong the conviction now grasping her must have been, by her answering in a murmur as though the pain of giving up a woman's ambition as Madeline had expressed it:

"It is indeed hard, Madeline, to give up an ambition, a craving which seems to have been born in you. Every good woman as you say longs for motherhood, and I assure you I did too. But that's all gone now, dear. That it's painful I know from experience, but when you wish to do two things which in the nature of them are physically and legitimately impossible if done at the same time,

there remains but one action to take. And that is the one which means the most to you, the one that all in all brings you what you most desire. Let me illustrate: suppose you want to stop on a street between two certain corners and yet desire to pass another point on the next street parallel with the first and between these same two corners. That would be physically impossible to do at the same time—wouldn't it? So what would you have to do, or what would you do? Go the way you most wanted to, not so?" she sighed. "Well, that's my answer Madeline. I am a woman, possessing the instinct of a good woman—if I say so myself—and yet I am going to give up my natural ambition for something, while not altogether unnatural, will bring me what I most desire while I live—ease of mind, contentment, possibly happiness."

Madeline looked at her strangely. "But Audrey, what of your conscience—what of that?" insisted Madeline.

Audrey looked at her friend. "My conscience, why my conscience is clear, dear, if that's what you mean. To your mind, possibly how or why, I cannot tell, you couldn't understand; but to my mind, I suppose because I feel and believe that what I am going to do is right—I think it right. Every woman in this world is entitled to have happiness, and if it remains with them to earn or obtain it, why cannot it be secured as they think right. You may answer, because I'm bad minded, I think of evil

things—yet all I can answer is: it is not so—you do me an injustice."

As Audrey drew to a close in her remarks the stillness was broken by the plaintive cry of a baby, at first low, then breaking out louder.

For a moment the two girls sat still. But the crying continued, and gradually growing louder, as though to testify to the absence of another to care for it, Audrey sprang from her chair and exclaimed: "Why Madeline, that must be Mrs. Bronstone's baby crying. Its mother must be down stairs. Suppose we run in and endeavor to put the child to sleep? If not successful, we'll call Mrs. Bronstone."

And as she concluded, they both ran to the door, through the hallway to the next apartment and moving the door-knob of the door they both stepped into the room. In the far corner of the room near the window a baby's crib stood. They glanced in its direction, and then ran to it. Approaching the crib, Audrey caught the infant in her arms. Audrey's eyes filled with joy and pleasure; in her arms she rocked the child to and fro; she soothingly endeavored to lull it to sleep; she looked down upon the innocent babe and kissed it.

Madeline watching, stood tranfixed; she admired the picture; Audrey and the child—the latter feeling the soothing effect, already was resting quietly, sleeping in Audrey's arms. Madeline was happy; she was hoping that the unexpected interruption might play a sufficiently strong argument for her

friend to change her views in life. She hoped that this little play would be more effective than all the verbal arguments she could advance.

CHAPTER VI.

"You see, Madeline, that is an illustration of life to-day; of how mothers care for their children and how infants are left to themselves," remarked Audrey when the two had returned to their room. "Here's Mrs. Bronstone, beautiful and wealthy, catered to and welcomed in society, the mother of as beautiful a child as was ever born. And mind you, she is not what one would call a society woman. She simply enjoys the association of strangers and friends. She places the baby in its crib, possibly first having lulled it to sleep, dresses for the evening and disappears in the whirl of society. She leaves the care of the child possibly to a maid, but more likely to itself. Let the child wake and cry, as it has just done; or let it fall from its cradle and injure itself, there would be no mother to care for it. Eventually, however, when the mother has satisfied herself to the utmost, enjoyed the evening until the small hours of the morning, then she returns, and not until then, little thinking and possibly, less

caring for the innocent and helpless babe. I say better would it be for all concerned for such women to remain single all their lives. At least then their misery would be their own and not forced on others," concluded Audrey. A righteous anger rose within her against such a class of women; towards such a mother.

Madeline was doubting; she didn't believe it. "Oh, you can't single out a case like this, Audrey. It is very likely only an isolated one any way," she argued.

Audrey was not to be denied. She knew from the experience others had had that this was not an isolated case. She had seen it too often. "You little know, Madeline, how many such cases exist. Especially among the rich. Their time is so occupied with society that they find no time for their home. To these women 'home' has but little meaning, and possibly less interest. Some of the more thoughtful and so to speak, more motherly women, may leave their babes in the care of nurses—and I am sure Madeline, you'll agree with me that that is just as bad," answered Audrey. Then a new thought entered her mind. There must be some reason for this. What was it? She thought she had found a cause. "What lies back of all this, what something is there now that makes women as a rule dislike the home and its duties and takes them out in the world; it's education Madeline, e-d-u-c-a-t-i-o-n. Now don't ridicule me, I know what I'm talking about. I have studied it; take the women of to-day. They

are educated, sent to school and when they have been taught all that a primary institution can teach them, they are sent off to higher schools of learning, and by the time these young women, our daughters of to-day, have left these colleges, their minds are full of *repletion* of learning. Of actual life and its experiences they know little or nothing. To household duties they are strangers. Ask them to make a dress, trim a hat, cook a meal, and they look at you with a stare, possibly with scorn. They turn up their nose at the mere suggestion. What is their ambition? What is it they want? They want to go out into the world and earn a livelihood if you will; but it is more likely to be independent and seek association with men. They want to meet him in the business and professional world as an equal—they forget a woman's natural instinct, possibly don't think or care about it, the greed of money and ambition to become somebody in a world that is not their world, possesses them—to obtain and grasp what is a man's goal in life; they want to be a man," Audrey persisted. Her passion had risen and her disgust was great toward a world which would teach women such ambitions, and permit them.

Whether she was arguing from the path of her argument—from the position she took towards the world of to-day—or whether she was simply endeavoring to justify in a way her future conduct by showing the trend being taken by her sex of the

present time, it would be hard to say. That she was earnest, however, in her belief there could be no doubt for it was quite apparent from her appearance that she was very much exercised over the subject.

She stopped long enough to catch a breath. Then she continued in the same vein insistently:

"The consequence is Madeline, that men do not think of the woman to-day as they formerly did. In generations gone by women seemed to possess an uplifting influence over men and men feeling this power looked to women for guidance and sympathy. In those days a man worshipped a woman, but to-day they don't consider them the fairer and weaker sex. They simply think of them as of those who have lost their modesty, their individuality and their womanhood; the result being that they treat them only as their equals, *entitled to no more consideration in any way than a man.* In place of compelling the man to look up to them, instead of uplifting him, the woman has compelled him, by her masculinity, to do just the contrary. He thinks less of her; he loathes her. Conditions have reached such a point that men consider women good but for one thing. And do I believe they're wrong? No, no, if women will so forget themselves; if women will lose their modesty and what their birthright gives them, then they should accept the penalty, but it is the result that is hard. The consequence is that a good woman, the natural woman, the

motherly woman, must suffer for the unnatural woman, the man-woman."

Madeline again could not understand. She could realize part of what Audrey had contended, but yet there remained some doubt as to whether or not these conditions, if it be true, could not be remedied if not altogether terminated. So she said:

"Then Audrey dear, why don't you, so far as you can, do your best to right this wrong; to cause reversion from the present day woman to her of yesterday?"

Audrey could not understand Madeline. It seemed as though she had spoken plainly. "But Madeline," Audrey replied, "It's not a proposition of righting a wrong. It is a necessity, yes, and if you will, an evil necessity, to live in the world of to-day with as much happiness and as little misery as one can. I do not believe that we were brought upon this earth to suffer. I live my way, because as I have just said, of necessity, not of choice, for I have a conviction to live happily to-day, it can be done more easily single than married. Women, and so-called progress of the world, have brought about this condition and we must meet it as we find it. You know what the saying is: 'When you live in Rome you must do as the Romans'. To live in a dream is very well while it lasts, but the difficulty is that in this life most dreams are nightmares."

"But Audrey dear, if all women were to believe as you are trying to make me believe and have me

think *you* believe; what would the world think; what would the world come to? Suppose our forefathers lived that way; what then?" cried Madeline.

"Now, dear, listen to me. I am not trying to make you believe anything. Nor am I endeavoring to have you think that I believe certain things. Know that I believe these things and very strongly, and so strongly that it is a conviction with me. The world? Why Madeline, I was in one of our houses of worship some few nights ago and I listened. It was a very strong one; it dealt with the question of the education of our children. I considered the speaker that night at his best. On leaving I met a lady whom I knew quite well, and she suggested to me, among other things, that she thought she had never heard the minister so poorly. I replied to her as I have just told you, that I thought he was fine, and then suggested that the difficulty with the world of to-day and the people living in it was, that they didn't like to hear facts, plain facts; that facts hurt, and that I had no doubt that the minister's words on this evening had gone home to many a heart; that's the difficulty." And then she continued, "So far as the world is concerned, I care nothing. At best, it is a hypocritical world anyway. You would have me live for the world—does it live for me? No. Were I in difficulty of any kind, would it assist me? No. But possibly yes, though only if it were assured of a *return.* It would demand more than it had given.

Suppose I needed a favor, for instance one that could be obtained from a woman? Would I get it? No, and you know it; there would be some kind of an excuse, some reason for refusing. Suppose I required the assistance of a man, could I hope for his help? No. But possibly, yes, if I were willing to give him more than an equal return; very likely something that I loved, cherished more than mere money, more than life. And this is the world you ask me to think of in my life, that you ask me to work for and live for. Madeline, you are living in a dream; you're not living in real life if you ask me what you do. Let me tell you that the person living for the world's good is a fool. Live for yourself, get what pleasure out of life you can; with propriety, while you can, for after you're gone, you're forgotten and the world goes on, neither disturbed at your demise nor even remembering that you ever existed," she ended breathlessly.

Again the idea that Audrey had become selfish rankled in Madeline's mind, but still she couldn't believe it; it wasn't like her Audrey to have a selfish motive or object in anything she did. Yet she was astonished at what she had heard. She could interpret only one meaning from Audrey's words. "Why Audrey, you speak like Alice Brudeen when you say such things, and look at her now? She was one of our playmates, liked and loved by all; now despised and shunned wherever she goes, by everyone she knows," cried Madeline in astonishment and awe.

A cloud passed over Audrey's face, "Oh, Madeline, don't misunderstand me. I didn't think you would compare me with her," she replied sadly.

Madeline immediately saw the mistake she had made and was quick to apologize for what she had said. Audrey went on:

"She's bad, bad. She took the downward path because of evil inclinations, possibly love of finery, that she could not obtain otherwise." Then disgustingly: "Why, she's unspeakable. She associated with all sorts of men, men of no pride and less honor—permitted them all kinds of liberties—even on first acquaintance. And worse yet, when she did become acquainted with a man bigger and better than them all, a man who learned to love her—God's will I suppose—a man who would have given his very life to have saved her—saved her from herself; she behaved so shockingly and disgustingly before him and in the presence of others, committed acts such as no selfrespecting man could tolerate; lost all opportunity of leading a good life as the wife of a good man with a chance to redeem herself in the eyes of God, if not a chance to wipe out the blackness and rottenness of her past. She confessed to him; he heard, and listened to what he thought were sad words—to her possible repentance, and offered to marry her. He was willing to take her away from her old associates, lift her from the gutter to respectability. Did she grasp the opportunity—not a bit of it; she cast him away for the life she knew better and possibly loved

better." Audrey came to a stop; the discussion of such a life must have been distasteful to her. Yet, possibly thinking of what such a life must be, even though it was a matter of choice and not compulsion, she continued, "I can't sympathize with such a woman Madeline, but I do pity her, for she must be insane; her brain must be callous. I guess she doesn't know the difference between right and wrong. I say, God help her, for such a life can lead only to disgrace and dishonor," she concluded solemnly.

"But Audrey, dear," questioned Madeline soothingly, solicitous not to insult her friend the second time. "Is there really much difference between the life she leads and that which you advocate. Aren't they identical? Doesn't the disgrace of the conduct show the same amount of degradation and lack of purity and honor? I may not be able to distinguish between the two, but it seems to me there is really little difference." She was puzzled; it troubled her to understand.

For Audrey no problem or doubt existed; she was quite satisfied that there *was* a difference. "No, Madeline they are not alike. To one of your mind it would be difficult for me to show the distinction. Yet to my mind there is a distinction, and a great one at that," she replied. And then with a sigh as if she knew her inability to show that distinction, yet determined to try and justify her position, she continued in an argumentative way; "I'm not susceptible to insults in this matter Made-

line, therefore, I am going to use myself as an example. As I just remarked, she was bad and lived an impure and indecent life for one of two reasons as already stated: either she did so for the finery, the pleasures she could obtain thereby, or else she became and continued bad because of her congenital tendencies, because of her passions, because she failed to own the power of love of a real woman, a good woman, and in its place was eaten up by the beast within her. I have decided to live this life because of *love—love;* how I crave for it —not passion. Passion does not control or lead me, but love does. I want to be loved, I must be loved and without it I would wither and die as the flowers. If I did commit improprieties; if my conduct was such as to cause you to hold up your arms with horror, if I became unclean and unchaste, if you will; it would be and will be because I loved and always will love Bob—for his sake—for *him,"* cried Audrey her eyes burning, her breast heaving, her whole body throbbing under the great enthusiasm of feeling that gripped her. "Do you understand now, Madeline—*can* you understand?" she exclaimed fiercely.

To Madeline the room seemed to be spinning around, so shocked and unnerved was she. Such expressions and such thoughts were new to her; and to her fine sense of feeling they seemed monstrous and unnatural. Yet so great was her confidence in her friend, so strong her trust and deep her love, she felt there must surely be some truth,

some fact in what Audrey had argued.

And what of Audrey? What were her reflections? Who could tell? She was quite satisfied with what she had said. Possibly the feeling within her that that which she was about to do, was right, played sufficiently strong to prevent any thought of possible future distress; she had thought of the future and all its possibilities; she had considered what it all meant. She had *decided.* To one of her mind, a determination, that there was no turning back. So she sat looking at Madeline, her eyes burning; and were it possible to read the story that lay behind them, her way of looking at life might be more appreciated.

"Love, you speak of l-o-v-e, Audrey. You say you *love* Bob. I love Jesse, and I feel as deeply as you do, Bob, and yet I couldn't speak the way you have just spoken." At last Madeline had broken the silence. "In fact, my love for him is such that I would gladly give up anything that I possess," concluded she.

And again Audrey replied to her friend. "You mean, Madeline, that the one way you could consummate, you could realize to its full, you could live, your love for Jesse would be to marry him. Well, you've done it and there is not much more to say. But what is *marriage* anyway? It is simply a form, legal and religious, which governs the conduct of two individuals, so to speak, legitimatizing that conduct, which without this legal and religious ceremony would be termed illicit. So when we

get down to it, what do we really find marriage is? Simply a sign, a symbol, a form. You flash it before the world, your friends and strangers, and tell them that you're *married,* that a man and woman are living together; the world gives you the *right* then to call yourselves *husband* and *wife.* My claim is that this ceremony, that this form, is unnecessary to a real *marriage*—to a *marriage of hearts, a marriage of souls.*" And then Audrey spoke without hesitation, and deliberately. "The real root and cause of marriage can be found in our nature—in our passions—in the animal that lives within us, that fires us. You know what I mean. *And it is that passion which suggests marriage, which compels. Not love; not heart.*" Audrey was speaking from the depth of her soul; she meant every word of what she said; these impressions came from her heart; they were sincere, and spoken not by an immoral woman, but a natural being—a good woman—looking forward to her life's happiness. There could be no question as to her object in such thought. The life she had always led told her friend that there could only be one reason for such a belief and that reason must be as she had stated: *love and happiness.*

Madeline was dumbfounded. For the third time she couldn't understand looking at life and at married life in such a way. It seemed to her that her friend had been reading of the dark side of life. But she wouldn't argue that point; her education, her experience, her life in that way had only begun

and she knew naught of it. So she repeated what she had last said; she again spoke of her love for her husband.

Again Audrey answered her. "Well, Madeline, you certainly gave up many things when you married Jesse." Madeline had suggested that she would relinquish everything for his sake. "Your friends, your freedom, your independence."

"But," interrupted Madeline.

"Yes, I know what you're going to say: that you are willing and would gladly, or possibly that you won't have to, that Jesse wouldn't ask you to," went on Audrey. She seemed to conceive what Madeline wanted to say. "But," she continued, "Madeline, your love will make you dependent and to a degree friendless; and your time will not be your own."

Madeline was looking at her friend; she was waiting evidently for the moment for her to cease. "But I'll be satisfied with having Jesse with me always; and then, too, he will never treat me as you think men treat their wives; he won't make me feel that I am dependent on him; he's too much a dear for that," Madeline insisted, smiling and happy.

But Audrey knew what she had said. "That's just it, Madeline. You think you will; you think he won't make you dependent—you equally so towards him—but when, however, you find you are dependent on your husband, that he will choose

your friends for you and dictate your living, you'll rebel. And so will he if you try it with him. I know it. I know you. I know him. Then you won't respect him and he won't respect you . . . You don't know . . . You're not experienced in life, Madeline. That is one of the greatest objections—the taking away of one's independence; the root of dissatisfaction that causes the knowledge to gnaw at your heart; in your mind, that you no longer can do as you please. Everyone fights *restraint* who is self-respecting. And again you will answer me; you will insist with every breath in your body that Jesse won't conduct himself that way; that he wouldn't think of treating you as he would a child. But listen to me: he will do it innocently and you will accept his dictation at first—because possibly, of your happiness, your new life—yet after a while when the novelty of your married state has disappeared and the stern reality of what is to come is present, then and I suppose—not until then—you'll learn from experience what I mean; and then will come the time when trouble and heartache arises; when second thought comes to you." Audrey argued with all the knowledge, with all the skill, with all the power of eloquence, that she possessed.

Madeline only smiled. She didn't believe it. Her husband would never treat her that way, she felt sure. "Oh, pshaw, Audrey, you exaggerate. You're making it really worse than it is; I'm sure you're making a mountain of a hill."

Audrey continued. "Very well, Madeline. I may exaggerate; I may be wrong; for your sake I hope so. Yet, I have a feeling, possibly due to my knowledge of your and Jesse's temperaments, that while you may now love each other dearly, the day will come when you will not live happily, for just the reasons I have stated. You remember, Madeline, the case of the young couple who had been keeping company for some time, the young lady presumably feeling that she would marry her sweetheart in the future; you may remember that she fell ill, so ill that she was ordered to leave the city; you remember that when she returned home on a visit, the condition of her health demanding her return to the mountains, the gossips became busy and told her that her friend was associating with young ladies while she was away; you may remember that she insisted that he should cease his attentions to these ladies; you may remember his reply that he didn't consider she had the right to restrain him absolutely from the company of ladies while she was away, forcing him to ostracise himself from society generally; do you remember that he objected to this restraint—and in my opinion, fairly and justly; and you may remember that they separated—her wish. That case and many cases serve food for thought. Don't forget that gossips sometimes cause irreparable unhappiness and injury."

A shadow passed over the clear brow of Madeline. She said: "Yes, I know the case you speak

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of, Audrey. It was a sad one. But let us get back to our discussion. What, when you have grown older, Audrey, and Bob then should leave you—how would it be?"

Audrey smiled. "I have no fear of the future, Madeline, when we have grown old. If before that time no discord should arise, I feel reasonably sure it never will. A man and woman together for years must naturally arrive at the period when they know each other thoroughly. There would be no inclination to part. The troubles of married life at any time do not arise in the later years, but in the early years. The perils of this early life are what break up the homes of to-day. That stage passed, we need have very little fear of the future."

Madeline wondered if her friend was right; whether there were soundness in her argument. "I——."

She said no more, for at that moment there came a faint tap upon the door. It opened.

Bob Benton and Jesse Church stood at the threshold. They saw by the flushed faces there must have been excitement of some kind.

"Well, girls, its about time that this talk of yours came to an end, eh?" inquired Jesse. And after a few moments:

"Well, what's the matter, girls; why so silent?" And then turning to Audrey, he demanded: "Now, Audrey, let's have it. I asked Bob to tell me about it, but he refused; said that you wanted that privi-

lege. I am anxious to hear it all—every word."

Again the girls looked at each other.

Looking him straight in the eye, Audrey said with a tremor: "Jesse, I'm not married to Bob. We're—not—married." Then she turned away.

Jesse looked as though a sledge hammer had struck him. Words would not come. At last, as though realizing the situation, with eyes flashing, with scorn and disgust covering his features, ignoring Audrey, he turned to his wife and in a commanding, angry voice, he cried: "Madeline, go to your own rooms and never let me know of your speaking to this woman again."

Madeline's lips moved, but words would not come. With one pitying look at her friend, which spoke of what the heart felt, she turned on her heel and disappeared.

Without a remark to either Audrey or Bob, her husband followed her through the door, closing it with a slam.

It was all past and done. Only four words were spoken, and they by Audrey.

"At last, it's over."

CHAPTER VII.

It was true as Audrey had said; the secret was out; the mystery—there was none. This life as Audrey saw it; it seemed so easy and simple in its theory, its preparation; yet how hard and strange on the practical side? Now that the revelation was over, they could go on. All seemed clear, and the future lay invitingly before them.

That Audrey had been thinking of this momentous question for some time could not be denied; that fact was evident from her discourse on the subject. Possibly her every waking hour found her thinking of that future; her dreams, too, empty of every other thought.

And so it will be found with all. For instance, those who contemplate marriage; those who consider the adoption of an entirely new course; of those who think of any other great question which in itself would naturally change entirely the future from what it otherwise would be. Great thought would be given to the matter; it would be argued

in one way and another, discussed in every phase, and then the ultimate result considered.

What thoughts were Bob's would be hard to say. He loved Audrey, and yet——. He would have done anything for her sake. He would give her the benefit of every doubt; he could not think or believe ill of her; he knew her well; possibly better than she herself; they had lived together all their lives from childhood, through the days of younger manhood and womanhood, and now that their majority, that the days of that manhood and that womanhood had been reached, he could not down deep in his heart believe harshly of her. He believed it to be a conviction—an honest and clean conviction—this course of living she had decided to pursue, but——. They had had many talks of her future—their future—recently; and he knew her thoughts, her beliefs, her convictions; he knew, or at least, he thought he knew, what the subject of her conversation with Madeline had been. They had gone over the situation, oh, how many times! Yet, to-night, after the scene just enacted, after the world knew it all, with the possible chance of keeping it yet a secret to a few, he resolved to try again; to force, to coerce her, if he could, into marrying him.

After sitting silent for some time, he cried: "Oh, Audrey, dear, why did you?"

And she, looking into his eyes, eyes that spoke his love for her, eyes that entreated, she answered:

"Oh, Bob, you know; it had to be, Bob, and this was as good a time as any."

"Oh, Audrey, dear, won't you change your mind? Won't you marry me? Don't you see it means so much to me? We'll go away, away from them all. We'll live together, by ourselves, away from everyone. All I want is you, y-o-u, dear, and I'll be happy." He was burning with the fever of the love within him.

She looked at him now as she rested in his arms. "Bob, won't you ever cease asking me that question? I've told you, oh, so often, *that I would not marry you, and I mean it, dear. We'll be happier together,* much happier, living single."

He pressed her close to him and as he kissed her, replied: "But I want to be sure of you, darling. I want to know you're mine forever. I don't want to lose you."

"But I told you, dear, that I'm yours, now and forever. You need not fear of losing me; it would break my heart to part with you because I love you too—and you know it. But I want you to feel a little that I am not entirely yours, *that if I ever wanted to love another or if I ever wanted to part from you, I could. That will make you hold to me and love me the more*—your feeling of *uncertainty—the knowledge that possibly you might lose me.* Don't you understand, dear?"

"I know you're wealthy, Bob, and I know I would have everything I wanted. And I also am aware that living with you the way I will I cannot accept

funds from you—I wouldn't if I could. But that isn't it, dear. Money has little attraction for me; I am not living this life for the grandeur and the riches that I might have, for the clothes, the jewels, the numerous rounds of pleasure I might enjoy, yet I, too, like beautiful things; but for my love for you, Bob, and my belief that I can be more happy and can retain your love longer by living this way than if we married." Her eyes appealed to him. She seemed to want him to understand. And she was endeavoring her utmost to make him realize, to make him comprehend the reason.

He in return looked at her. He seemed to grasp a little of what she meant; he seemed to appreciate now that it was as much for his sake as for her own that she wanted to live this life. He knew without her saying so, that she had sacrificed many a principle and many a natural ambition to live her life the way she intended. "You may be right, dear, but even so I want you to marry me; I want to have you all my own; I want you always to be near me; I want to make your every moment of life happy, and have the right to; and I want to feel my love some day may be consummated—a union of love." He murmured these few last words as he caressed her and slightly stroked her hair.

"I tell you now, dear, that you may always look to my comfort if you want to; you may always think of me, and shower your attentions upon me; you may always love me; and yet, we need not be married. Unity of love. To my mind

there is but one way of making a happy loving couple, be they couples of men or women, and that is let the hearts be in the right place; let it be not infatuation, not affection alone; let it make the heart feel that if a separation were to come a great despair would overwhelm one, that one would feel that the heart would burst, that life no longer could exist. That's what I call love. This other—oh, what's the use, it disgusts me to speak of it—*is not love;* it's a kind of passion, it's the beast in a man or in a woman. It's simply the satisfying of temporary desire, *does not come from the heart, but—.*"

"Oh, Audrey, don't think like that of me! I assure you that there is nothing of the beast in me—at least, not to the extent that you seem to feel." Bob had interrupted, and he looked strangely at Audrey. This, to him, was a new way of looking at the cause, the root, the meaning of love. He wasn't quite equal to its understanding.

She seemed to be satisfied. She didn't want him to understand that she thought him different from any other man. He was simply human; so was she. "No, Bob, I know that you're only a natural being. I didn't mean that you looked at love in the way I believe most people do. But most people do look at it in that way, and love with that object in view. That's what they call 'the consummation of love.' But then, dear, let us drop the subject. We're happy, aren't we? You are, I am. And what more do we want? Yes, what more can we ask and expect?" She had concluded. She seemed

to infer that there was no more to be said. The discussion was at an end.

"But there is another thing, dear," he insisted. "What will our friends say when they learn the truth? When they learn of the life we intend to live? Won't they shun us and speak ill of us? Of course, they will not make me the subject or object of their scorn and detestation; they won't say much of me—the man is very seldom blamed for living this way—but they will make you the target for their abuse and slander; what will they say of you?"

She smiled. "Now, that's just like you, you dear fellow. What do I care what other people say or think or feel or know. What do I care for my so-called 'friends.' My conscience is clear; I believe I am doing right; that I am living the best way for myself. Possibly, those who would speak ill of us—of me—are much worse than we are. And Bob, let me tell you, that those who are our friends will not look down on us because of the life we intend to live."

But Bob could not see the future the same as Audrey apparently did. To his mind, living the way Audrey suggested and insisted, he believed that there was misery and unhappiness in the days to come for the both of them. But what could he do? Should they separate, he go his way and Audrey go hers? His heart would not permit him to part from the one being in all the world whom he loved best—who meant so much to him. He could not—he would not. He loved her more than life itself.

Inwardly and outwardly he rebelled, but the ending was always the same. He would live her way, hoping that every day, more and more, would show her the fallacy and monstrosity of her convictions, and gradually and finally, the error of her principles and that then she would gladly and willingly agree with him as to a conventional married union.

The quiet of the room was restful, especially to Audrey who had passed through so severe an ordeal. No noise from below came to their ears. From the open window the soft breeze from the far-off mountains and the aroma of the shrubbery and plants around the veranda of The Inn cooled and perfumed the room.

Looking down into the eyes of Audrey, Bob was surprised to find that they had closed; and the steady and even breathing of she who lay in his arms, told him that she was asleep. He gazed upon the body of her whom he loved, worshipped and cherished; and sighed. He wanted to awaken her so she might go to her rest for the night, a rest he felt she sorely needed after the strenuous day just coming to a close, she had passed through. He too, was tired, for to him the day also had been a hard one. He wondered what time it was and took out his watch. Lovingly he glanced at her; then looked at the watch; he was shocked at the hour; and unconsciously the words passed his lips, as he muttered: "Two o'clock!" Then again he sighed. He thought. Disturb her? Never, he said to himself.

Rather hold her in his arms throughout the night, than . . . .

She opened her eyes and dreamily inquired in a whisper: "Where am I?" and replied to her own inquiry: "Ah, yes, I know. Bob, dear, what time is it? I am awfully tired, dear," she ended in a murmur.

"It's very late, dear," he replied. "It's two o'clock in the morning." He kissed her.

How time goes with wings of lightning when one is in love! Hours are minutes, minutes, seconds. Nights are never long enough, and days come to an end with haste incredible.

Audrey lifted her head again and still gazing into those eyes which seemed to burn with love for her, she folded her arms around his neck and pressing him closer to her, as though it were possible, she whispered in his ear, "Kiss me, dear."

CHAPTER VIII.

Midnight at The Inn! To many of its patrons that hour has but little meaning; but to at least one man it brought many thoughts and convictions. The reflections of Jesse Church were such as we may readily conceive.

Society and the world over condemned such a practice as that advocated by Audrey, and Bob could not condone it. It was in direct contravention to the social economy of the world. It always had been, and it was well to presume that it always would be. *Celibacy!* Great God! It was monstrous, it was unnatural; yes, it was criminal. To Jesse Church's mind it was the greatest crime of which one could be guilty. It was criminal against oneself and against the world. Wasn't that enough? Could he conscientiously permit his wife to continue friendship and association with such a pair? No, he could not, because he must at least protect his own self-respect.

In solemn and friendly thoughts it pained Jesse Church to think of such a future for his life-long friends, Audrey and Bob. If two such beings thought of living in such a manner, what would the world come to? What must it come to? And if people were going to live their future lives in such a way, what could possibly be the reason for it? There must be a reason, he argued with himself. What great change was coming, or rather had come, that such a course was to be taken by them? Were all the young men and women of to-day and to-morrow thinking the same way of life? he wondered.

He was a member of the church when he was in the city; attended regularly. Figuratively speaking, he was a part of the church. He was a Sunday-school teacher, and had been for many years past. He liked its work and was a firm believer of religious teachings, and the object of that teaching to the world.

Jesse Church was determined—and yet he sighed deeply as he thought of what was to come. He knew that his wife and Audrey Chittenden had been baby playmates, girl acquaintances, and young women friends, and loved each other dearly. He knew, as though his wife had already told him, that parting—a permanent separation—of the two would give her many sleepless nights, many heartaches. He knew they loved each other as sisters, and even more so. What could he do? He felt sincerely that for his own future and his wife's happiness there

was but one thing to do, and he saw only one way: separation.

And so in a soothing tone, when they had reached their rooms, believing it best to proceed calmly, and then if necessary, take a more strenuous and determined position, he said to his wife:

"I'm sorry that I spoke to you so harshly, dear. I didn't mean to. But the shock of what Audrey told me and the full meaning of it, enraged me, and I really didn't appreciate how strongly I had spoken to you. Isn't it sad though to realize what it all means, and particularly what it proposes for Audrey—our Audrey?

"I know," answered Madeline, "I told Audrey what it would mean, and what her friends and the world would think of her and such a life—but she's determined—not through any bad or passionate motive, but because of her love for Bob and the conviction that she can and will live more happily in the future with him. I did try, oh, so hard, to have her see things in the right way. I argued with her, I tried to persuade her; but I could not convince her."

"Possibly, she didn't want to be convinced—didn't and wouldn't see the error and badness of her thoughts."

"No, it isn't that. I believe she could be argued with, if the argument was the right one, and if satisfied, would change her idea of life, but I couldn't answer her argument. What a changed girl Audrey is! How strangely she talks! I never heard her say such things before. I almost cried. Yet, there

were many things she said and many illustrations she made, that I know to be true of myself, and still many others that I know are true of the married people of to-day—of couples I know intimately; you know them too."

"W-h-a-t !" exclaimed her husband in astonishment, a fear creeping into his eyes.

His wife was quick to rejoin. "Now don't interrupt, dear; you needn't worry. Audrey has not really changed my ideas of life."

And then, happy within his heart to hear and believe what his wife had said, he embraced her,

"A woman who would possess such ideas and live such a life is not a fit companion for a young married woman. She is not the proper kind of a friend for you to associate with," he calmly insisted.

"But, dear, what difference would Audrey's ideas or thoughts make to me? I don't believe as she does, and she couldn't persuade me either."

"Madeline, dear," he said, "won't you understand? She's not what she used to be; then she was an innocent young girl and your association with her could have done you no possible harm; but now, it is different. She is a woman of the world, with thoughts and ideas of life that are revolting, and if you continue to remain friendly with her, your friends' present high regard for you will no longer exist for you, and in its place you will find that they will despise you, too. You know the old saying, that tell me who your associates are and I'll tell you what you are. Madeline, I must insist that

you refer to Audrey no more. I must insist that you see her no more."

"STOP—remember, Jesse, you may slander my friends and I may be unable or too weak to defend them. You are my husband. I am your wife, but I do not believe that even that relationship gives you the right or privilege of insinuating that I am not self-respecting. I will not permit it," she cried, her eyes blazing and her breath coming fast. Tears of anger moistened her eyes.

Her husband was alarmed at the turn the situation had taken. At the outset his only intention was to show his wife how impossible it would be for her to continue such a friendship, and felt that she would be more reasonable and look at the matter with eyes of reason. Yet he thought it would be well to pacify her.

Madeline dried her tears, and lay with open eyes staring at the opposite wall. Rising quietly from the chair he moved noiselessly toward her. She did not move.

She moved her lips and as he listened, he heard her say:

"Let us retire; I'm so tired."

CHAPTER IX.

The Catskills at sunrise! A more picturesquely lovely scene it would be difficult to find, in the world.

From the Heights of Jefferson which rise high above the village below, the sight is entrancing. Far in the distance to the right lay the range of mountains which have become renowned from the stories of Rip Van Winkle and his haunts. The range mounts high toward the heights of the heavens above. The magnificent trees, centuries old, pierce to dizzy heights; the farms below resemble a checker-board, the winding road running along the base of this natural high wall, the creek which is the natural irrigation for this entrancing stretch of country, so with water shallow yet so clear—all constitute a panorama once seen never forgotten.

It was this picture that a young couple sat admiring on a very early Sunday morning—the day following the event related in the foregoing chapters. They were pointing in the direction of the highest ridge. Ah, it must be the ever Living Image: "The Man on the Mountain," that attracted their attention! As their eyes looked steadily in that direction, they could see the outline of a man as though lying flat on his back on the very highest peaks, extending over three or four of them. The head was most pronounced, and as the eye followed the outline of the figure they could also plainly discern the torso. And then it seemed as though the next peak or rise formed the legs of the figure. It was one of Nature's wonders, and no one who has ever visited this section of the country has failed to gaze long at this natural image, or failed to glowingly tell of it to their friends, on return to their homes.

The gentleman looked at his companion and softly queried: "Why, Audrey, do you know what time it is!"

She looked up in surprise. Evidently the time of the day at that moment interested her very little. "No, Bob, I haven't the least idea—though I suppose it must be near breakfast time, dear."

"It's 8:30," he answered, and then they turned back in the direction of the Inn.

They breakfasted leisurely. In the middle of the meal, "don't turn, Audrey," Bob suddenly cautioned, "here come Madeline and Jesse. I wonder whether they will come to our table. Madeline

doesn't look very cheerful or happy this morning."

Jesse, took hold of Madeline's arm lightly and conducted her to a table, far from where Bob and Audrey were sitting.

This pantomime spoke louder and plainer than any words could have possibly done. Only one decision was there to render, and carry out from now on. Henceforth, there was but one thing to do—to leave her friend—never so much as give her cause to remember her—so far as possible, to remain outside the vision of her friend's eyes. Possibly Madeline would thus learn to forget her, and then——

Jesse and Madeline had risen late—possibly due to a sleepless night—her cheeks were shallow and drawn and pale. His brow presented a worried look. As he looked at his wife he could see that she had not forgotten the events of the night before, and he feared that she was not likely to forget them. So he resolved to be kind to her, and make her as happy as it was within his power to do. But of one thing he was yet determined.

So he smillingly, with apparent joy at the thought, murmured to her as they sat sipping their coffee:

"This morning, dear, we'll go to the little church in the village. And this afternoon we'll stroll to the Glen. It's a beautiful day for the trip."

She looked at him, and with an attempt to appear happy replied:

"Yes, dear, I know we'll enjoy it."

"Isn't it pitiful, dear?" said Audrey. "Madeline's

unhappy already, and she's hardly commenced her future. It tears my heart to think of it. If there was anything that I could do, I would gladly do it."

Bob took Audrey's arm and they strolled away.

Later, Audrey and Bob retired to the veranda of the Inn finding a cool and quiet corner. They spent an hour or two so, and then went to their rooms. They were to return to the city in a few hours, and must pack their bags. In their happiness and joy, they forgot their friends. They only thought of the future. This country of quiet and peace they were soon to leave for the more active and work-a-day world.

Different were the doings of Madeline and Jesse —husband and wife forty-eight hours!

It seemed as though their life had started wrong —that there was a something . . . .

They were both deep in thought; their room seemed to them as though the air were stiffing, and that they must get out into the purer atmosphere. They left the Inn, and without a word as to their destination, they strolled along. They found themselves turning down Jefferson Avenue toward "Snake Alley."

As they neared the porch of the Inn on their return, they almost ran into Audrey and Bob, who were leaving. As the girls met, tears came to Madeline's eyes, tears shown in Audrey's.

Jesse looked on at this little drama taking place before his very eyes. But he said nothing. He

simply took his wife's arm gently, and they passed up the steps.

In the car, Audrey and Bob found cosy seats, and as the trained moved faster, he turned to her, and softly said:

"Look how beautiful the river is to-day and we've got to leave it all."

She looked into his eyes tenderly, and then murmured in reply. "Never mind, dear, we'll come again—won't we?"

Her brain was on fire. She couldn't think coherently. A fit of crying convulsed her.

She fell again into a troubled doze, and was awakened by the fright of hearing the door of her room open. She sat upright in bed, and stared. The sight she saw almost made her scream. But she controlled herself, and all that was heard was a pitiful moan, and a sob.

Her husband had come home! She glanced at the clock. Two o'clock. She again looked at him. Her eyes were dim from the tears she had shed, but clearing, she saw a sight she was not accustomed to—her husband had come home; again she stared at him. She was terrified. He was drunk; intoxicated. That he could "navigate" was about all. He tried to close the door behind him as he entered; it was difficult. It was too much for her frail and nervous constitution. She shrieked, and fell over on the bed in a faint.

II
THE PRACTICE

PROPERTY
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CHAPTER XI.

"Never mind, Middy," (Audrey Chittenden was addressing her mother. 'Middy' was a term of affection she always used when speaking to her). "I'll go to the door. I guess it's Bob." She sprang from the chair and ran out in the hallway.

Mrs. Chittenden sat still. She smiled knowingly as though she too knew the ring. She was happy.

She wondered what good she had accomplished in this world that God had given her a child like her daughter, Audrey.

Audrey was the willing and eager slave of the home. She would not permit her mother to put a hand to anything.

During the day Audrey was employed as the private secretary and stenographer of the senior member of the firm of Stockholm, Tenney & Co., a large

brokerage firm on Wall Street. It was her salary which supported the home. There was another trifling income—the interest on a small sum of money that had been left by Audrey's father years before, realized from an insurance policy.

Mr. Chittenden had died many years before. His death was sudden. His savings were small, and what there were of them, had been eaten up while Audrey was still a young girl. In those days she was too young to go out to work and Mrs. Chittenden believed that her daughter should receive some education. So she had permitted the child to finish schooling; and when she was old enough, allowed her to seek a position.

Audrey had held her present place for many years, and she was beloved by all who knew her. Her employer considered her a jewel of the rarest water. As her years of employment increased, so Mr. Stockholm had increased her salary, until now the amount she received was quite a handsome one —sufficient for the support of her mother and herself in comparative luxury.

And Bob Benton! He was a man! How she loved him! A finer man she felt sure did not live. He too, looked to her every comfort.

The only thing Mrs. Chittenden feared was the time when he would, she knew, take her daughter away from her. But she was satisfied. It would have been indeed a selfish mother who would have permitted her own welfare to count for anything, when the happiness of her daughter rested in the balance. In fact, she believed that no such daughter

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and son-in-law would have entertained the proposition of separation. Down deep in her heart she believed, that when the day came for Bob to claim Audrey that day he would take her too.

So in her old age she was happy. She belonged to the generation that was closing an era. A new manner of life had been born, and she knew she was of the old school. She realized that her time, her ways, were not the time and ways of the present. Only one heartache she possessed, and that was that God had taken her husband from her; that she could not have enjoyed these declining years of her life with him, side by side.

Mrs. Chittenden didn't hear the steps of the intruders; they had approached the room quietly, and stood in the doorway with their arms about each other.

"Don't disturb her, Bob," whispered Audrey. "Let's stand here, and watch."

Suddenly "Middy" moved, and looked up, only to find her daughter smiling down upon her.

"Oh, you rogues, why didn't you come in," she said. "I was only doing some little thinking to myself. Really, I didn't hear you."

"Now, mother, you looked so happy and peaceful, we didn't have the heart to disturb you," laughingly replied Bob.

They sat down. Bob spoke. "It's a beautiful night out-doors," he said.

"I know it. I can see it from the window," she replied. And she went on: "Well, what are you children up to to-night?"

"Why Middy," spoke Audrey. "How forgetful you are getting. Don't you know to-night is 'Mission' Night," she said, tantalizingly rebuking her mother mildly for her apparent forgetfulness.

"Oh, that's right, daughter. I had forgotten it. Well, I suppose you want to get along, so you can reach home early. There, go ahead, don't let me keep you. Are you going in Bob's car?" she inquiringly concluded.

"No, mother; I didn't bring the car, because Audrey never would go to the Mission House in it; she has some foolish notion that what an automobile signifies has a sad and selfish effect on the poor people attending there; and it's such a lovely night for a spin, too," he apparently regretfully ended. Bob never could understand why Audrey had always refused to motor to the Mission House.

Possibly "Middy" did understand, for she replied: "I think daughter is right, Bob. I wouldn't care to go in it either."

Audrey had dressed, and was ready to go out. Affectionately she stooped and kissed her mother; Bob did the same.

"Are you happy, dear?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered.

They finally reached the Bowery—the poorest, the ugliest, the dirtiest, the worst of the great thoroughfares. They turned into it, and then to the right. What a tremendously noisy street it was!

Audrey and Bob followed the street for some blocks; they were only retracing their steps—steps

that they had walked time and time again. At Audrey's request and wish they made periodical visits to the Mission House, until Bob had come to call a certain evening that they had agreed upon, if nothing else prevented, to make the visit: "Mission night."

Audrey Chittenden had made this a duty; a part of her life work; she considered that she ought to do all she could for the betterment of the lower classes, of the down-trodden and unfortunate. She even went so far as to contribute and donate her little bit—all that she could spare from her small income. Of her time and labors, she gave willingly and happily. She was never known to turn a deaf ear to the needy, the homeless, or the deserving. These people all worshipped her; she was their ideal, their idol, and they tried to live their lives according to her teachings; and they set themselves to accept her as an example of everything that was good, honorable and unselfish. She was known among them as "Miss Chitty," a name that seemed to spell affection and devotion.

Audrey and Bob shortly came before the Mission House. In the hall she was immediately saluted. There never was an attempt to become unduly familiar. They crowded around her, their eyes speaking the respect and appreciation they owed her. And Audrey never permitted herself, by either action or words, dress or display to make her people feel she was better than they were—that she was above them. She would make them believe that

in breeding, education or living they were her equal. She always made them feel that she was fortunate, lucky; and that they were just the opposite—unfortunate and unlucky.

And from all her labors, from all her teachings, from all her help, she received no returns, except that which she felt in consoling herself with the knowledge, that even if her labors were unappreciated, were not accepted in the spirit in which they were tendered, that she was well paid in that it all was a labor of love. And to her this was sufficient recompense. She loved her work here in the slums of New York, and it would have taken great things to persuade her to give up her life work. For a "life work" she considered it.

She took off her hat and the light wrap she had taken with her against the possible chill of the late October night air, before entering the large public hall where she addressed her people. To-night was "meeting night," and this particular meeting was to be a busy and a long one. She had several committees and sub-committees to report, and she must hear and determine those reports.

During all the time the meetings proceeded, Bob remained an attentive spectator, sitting down in front of the small platform beside the others. And he never was pressed for room. He was known as "Miss Chitty's" escort and protector—and possibly among the more presuming, "her fellow"—and his privacy was never intruded upon. These people had on many an occasion tasted of his generosity.

These people had almost as much respect for

him as they did for her; but their "Miss Chitty"—why she was the best of them all. Of all the good ladies who succored them, none was loved more than she. And so Bob Benton was always a silent spectator in the deliberations of the Mission's meeting. Sometimes he would make merely a suggestion, because he felt that he would have these people work out their own salvation so far as they could.

Many matters were brought up for consideration on this particular night, but it would be tiring to the reader to go into them all. Only two subjects need be referred to as leading to later events.

A young woman, Miss Eva Lounsbery, Miss Chitty's lieutenant, was to report on the condition of the McCarthy family. These poor people had been suffering for weeks past. Mrs. McCarthy was the mother of six children, all of tender age, ranging from six months to ten years. Her husband had recently taken ill and his family were, therefore, deprived of his wages. The Mission was doing its best to assist them. And Mrs. McCarthy, she was taking in washing and ironing, and scrubbing offices to keep the home together. Recently her strength had been giving way, and she could not work as she had been doing. Therefore the Mission was called upon to assist.

Miss Lounsbery reported that she had visited Mrs. McCarthy early that evening, and was sorry to inform the assemblage that what she found was heart rendering and pitiful; yet not so much more

different than could be found in many of the poorer families in the city. Mr. McCarthy was suffering greatly and the physician sent for could not relieve him, a more experienced physician only could restore him to health. Miss Lounsbery went on to say also that the children were not looked after and cared for, that the family was in a pitiful condition.

The missionaries waited in silence to hear from Audrey Chittenden. Although they were anxious, they seemed to know what she would say; and they were not mistaken—they knew her well.

Her opening words were reassuring. "My dear people, it indeed grieves me to hear this most distressing report on the condition of our friends—the McCarthy family. Need I say more than to state that I shall stop at their home after leaving here to-night, and that you may be satisfied that I shall not go away until I have done my little share in relieving their sufferings? I shall do my best."

She had finished. In fact, she never made it a point to speak for any length of time on cases of distress.

The next matter that attracted the attention of the many present, and with which we have to do, were the words of the next speaker. She was known as one of the most indefatigable workers the Mission could boast of, and her remarks were always awaited with great interest.

"Miss Chairman," she said, "It gives me pain to be compelled to speak. But I feel I must. The matter I know is of interest to all of us, and I can

only explain the failure to have taken it up before with the reason that the great amount of work we have found necessary and pressing, has permitted the matter to escape us. But what has become of Mrs. Church? We have not seen her here lately, and I feel that something must be wrong. Ought we not to inquire as to the cause of her absence? Has the good lady done so little that she is to be forgotten? I feel that we fail to remember what we owe her. And therefore, I move that a committee of one be appointed by the chair to visit Mrs. Church, and seek out the cause of her termination of interest."

Audrey's face had grown white. She had made it a point never to embarrass her friend since that memorable night in July, over a year before. Madeline must soon, she knew, become a mother; she had heard something of the kind whispered about before. Yes, that must be the cause.

The people were waiting to hear from her; she saw it in their faces. She aroused herself and quietly said: "You need have no fear my friends; I have a faint idea of the cause of our good Mrs. Church's absence; but no, I can't tell. I'll appoint, if you will, the good lady who was so kind as to think of her. I'll appoint her a committee of one, to call on Mrs. Church."

The meeting closed.

As they reached the street, Bob remarked: "Audrey, what did you mean to-night when you said that you thought you had an idea of the cause

preventing Madeline putting in an appearance here lately?"

Audrey blushed and then smiled. "Oh, you goose, you. Haven't you heard that Madeline is expected to become a mother soon?"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" was all he replied.

* * * * * * *

Down stairs in the street, Bob was walking to and fro in front of the house. He had turned for perhaps the tenth time, and was walking back toward the stoop, when he noticed a young boy running in his direction. He could see that the boy was breathless and excited, and he presumed that he had come a considerable distance, so far that it had taxed his little strength.

Bob stopped him as he came to a halt in front of the house and was apparently looking to find if it was the one he wanted.

"What's the trouble little fellow?" he inquired gently.

The boy could hardly reply. "Is—this—er—223? Is—'Miss Chitty'—here?" the boy breathlessly gasped.

Bob became frightened; something must be the matter; what could it be? He was quick to cry:

"Yes, 'Miss Chitty' is here; what's the trouble, my boy?"

The boy was still breathless and his heart was thumping heavily against his side.

"I must see ' Miss Chitty'—in—a hurry."

"Tell me, I'm her friend."

The boy was greatly excited. His eyes burning, he cried in answer. "Oh, I can't tell you. I must see 'Miss C——'"

"It's all right little fellow, tell me, you can't see her now."

For a second he remained silent, as if deciding what to do. Then he cried the words choking in his throat. "Miss—Chitty's—mother—is—dying." The tears were coming fast from the little fellow's eyes and he cried as though his heart would break.

Bob was struck dumb. "Middy" dying?

He could not believe it. Why, they had only left her an hour or two before. Oh, there must be some terrible mistake; and yet, this boy, his running, his coming to this house in all haste. Oh, there must be some truth in the report.

What should he do? He held on to the boy. He must not be allowed to break in on Audrey in this way. "That's all right, little fellow," his voice shook. He handed him a coin which was firmly refused. "That's all right." He was almost crying himself, man that he was. The news had so shaken him. "That's all right, little fellow, you go home. I'll tell 'Miss Chitty'."

Oh, God! how could he break the news to Audrey. How could he have the heart; the strength? It would kill her, but it must be done.

So he sprang up the stoop, while the occupants thereof huddled together to let him pass. They had heard the news as the boy had cried it out. Their eyes were filled with tears. The mother of their "Miss Chitty"! It was terrible!

Up the first flight he sprang, two steps at a time, until he was stopped on the next floor by the object of his errand blocking the hallway.

"Why, Bob, what's the trouble? You're in an awful haste—and Bob," she had seen the color of his face, it was ashen. "What's the matter—you're the color of white chalk—quick, tell me," she cried.

"Why Audrey—nothing—nothing. Only I don't feel well," and she came to him in fear. Then he went on. "Oh, don't worry, I'm all right. Only let's get out of this place. Let's get out of this air. I'll feel better then."

How he ever reached the street he never could tell. All he knew was that he was out. Thank heaven, that the good people, who were still speaking in a whisper had said nothing. He caught Audrey by the arm, and as she was quick to inquire how he felt, he insisted:

"Now listen, Audrey, we'll get a taxicab. I don't feel strong enough to walk, and we'll drive home."

She wanted to protest, but one look at his pale face prevented her.

They reached the Bowery. How, Bob never knew, and as luck would have it, he spied a taxi coming along slowly—empty. He called to the driver. He gave him the direction, and then concluded as he assisted Audrey in:

"Drive like hell, man—double the charge—don't stop for anything or anybody." He spoke in a harsh whisper. Audrey didn't hear, and as he jumped in he heard the man reply:

"Yes, sir."

* * * * * * *

He had broken the news tenderly and lovingly to her—only as a lover could. She cried softly as he held her in his arms during the race across the town—a race against death—one he hoped he would win. He could not tell—he knew nothing—only, that Audrey's mother was dying. He hoped and prayed that Audrey would be strong enough to bear it. She clung to him and he held her tightly.

The taxi at last had come to a stop. He opened the door and sprang out; as he did so, he crushed a bill into the hands of the driver. He helped Audrey out. She lay heavily on his arm. He managed to get her up the stairs, and on the threshold of her home he met the family physician.

Anxiously he cried: "Doctor——"

It was not necessary for him to go further. One glance from those friendly and sympathetic eyes was enough; it told its own story. Mrs. Chittenden —"Middy"— was no more. She had gone to rest with the angels.

They sprang into the room. Audrey gave one look at the still form of her mother as it lay on the bed, and with one piercing scream, she fell across the body. She lay still. And when Bob reached her side to take her away, he found that she had fainted.

CHAPTER XII.

It was a week later. The mortal remains of Audrey's mother had been laid in their last resting place. She always had during her life insisted that she be laid in the family plot in the cemetery up the State, where her husband's body reposed.

Audrey wanted to return to her duties soon after the funeral, but Mr. Stockholm had told her that during her absence he would secure a substitute, and that as soon as she was entirely recovered, her position would be waiting for her. He sent many kind inquiries and tokens of his respect while she was away, and Audrey appreciated it all deeply.

Her people at the Mission House also joined in showing their great regard for her.

Since that terrible night of a week before, Bob had not left her side. He feared for her health and strength. In every way he looked to her comfort, as only he knew how.

The funeral was over. Audrey was home. But to what a lonely and cheerless one! The shock had been great; the loss was as sudden as a bolt of lightning out of a clear sky, but gradually she reconciled herself to her loss.

She was grateful, oh so grateful, to her many friends for their words, their tokens of consolation. But there was no kind word or message from Madeline Church. Of all her friends, she was the only one she had not heard from.

She was alone in the world! Can anyone appreciate or know what that means? A woman alone, bereft of father and mother? It meant solitude and loneliness; it meant that she no longer could confide and talk to one so dear as a mother; it meant that no more could she look to the comfort and happiness of the one she loved so dearly. Her life henceforth would be an empty one; the object of her future—to make the declining years of her "Middy's" life a happy one—had been taken from her.

Yet there still remained to her, Bob. And she felt that for him she must live; she had indeed days before her which might yet see her happy. His love would be a great heart interest, a great thing. He—his presence—would take the loneliness out of her life and give to her some joys. Ah, his love! That meant all in all to her now, if possible, more than ever before. She determined to live for him, and in return for his affection, she would give him her all—she would try to make him happy.

Why? Let matters rest as they are, Let's go on like we are. You're happy, aren't you?"

"Y-e-s, but I want you to marry me. Then I'll be happier, dear." He held her closer. She felt his hot breath upon her cheeks. "Middy has gone now, and you are alone." She closed her eyes and sobbed. "Come to me; be mine." She had forced him.

Slowly her eyes opened. "I'm all right, dear. I'm not alone when you are here."

Their eyes met. "Then come live with me, Audrey. Come, be under my protection. Be always near me so I can feel you're safe from harm and sorrow."

She pondered, and then she said in a whisper:

"Not yet, dear, not yet, but maybe soon."

He was forced to be satisfied with her decision. "Very well, dear. If you insist, I can do nothing. But you must promise me that when the day comes that you are lonely with your life here, when you feel you must have me near you always, when you want me to guard over you, that that day you will come to me."

She kissed him. "I promise, dear," she murmured.

A great sigh escaped him. At last he could rest easy in the knowledge that she would come to him. Her promise was sufficient. He kissed her as though to bind the bond.

He knew that her employer had insisted upon her remaining away from business. But he had hopes

that he could persuade her to resign for all time.

"Audrey, dear." She looked at him. "Won't you resign your position with Mr. Stockholm? I don't want you to work any more. I've sufficient for both of us," he pleaded, almost begged.

"No, dear, I shan't give up my position as yet. Don't be too anxious, dear, all will come in good time. Mr. Stockholm has been more than kind to me; more than a friend, I might say. You know he insists I shall not return to business until I am fully recovered. He wants me to leave the city for a short period," she answered him. "But that I won't do. I'd simply go mad away from the city, and in the country this time of the year," she went on. And then she spoke as though she had reached her decision and would not be moved. "I'm determined to remain in the city, and if I must stay away from business, I'll just spend the time going about town."

"After my return, I'll tell Mr. Stockholm that I intend to resign, but not until he has secured the services of another. I'll give him until the first of the year to obtain an assistant."

Another promise. He was happy.

"Then you will give up your position, Audrey?" He could imagine before his mind's eye the day, although it was months away. "Fine, fine; you're grand, dear," he ejaculated.

The days that followed found Audrey in and around the city. To spend her time away from the thoughts of her bereavement, she visited the

Mission House, and made many a call on the McCarthy family to learn how they were living. She was glad to hear that the husband was slowly convalescing at the hospital, that the wife was also recovering her strength, and that the children were being taken good care of at the Mission Nursery. Other days she would spend at home. And still on others, Bob would send his car around, and she would drive into the country along the Hudson, a short distance from the city.

One evening Bob asked Audrey whether, if the weather permitted the following morning, she would like to have the car for a run. She thankfully declined, telling him that she intended to walk in the park the next day if the weather permitted, as she was tired of driving.

The following afternoon she visited Bronx Park, strolled over the meadows, and passed through the Zoo and Botanical Gardens. The cool air was indeed invigorating, and when she arrived home that evening, she was looking well.

But of one incident that had occurred in the afternoon, she knew nothing. Someone had seen her while in the park, just as she was entering the Botanical Gardens.

Madeline Church that afternoon had ordered her car for a drive, and decided to motor through the Bronx. As the car passed in front of the Gardens, she was almost taken bodily out of her seat by the shock of seeing Audrey dressed in black—a drapery which she knew could only mean a be-

reavement. She pondered a moment, and then the thought that it must be Audrey's mother, brought tears to her eyes. She thought it strange that she had heard nothing of Mrs. Chittenden's death. But that could easily be accounted for by reason of the fact that she had seldom visited friends, and not at all the Mission House. She had been too unhappy. But she must find out something; she must know! She couldn't go to Audrey's home. No. But she could call at the Mission House. The people there would know.

So she ordered the chauffeur to drive down-town.

Some time later they arrived at the Mission House. Madeline directed the driver to enter.

He returned. Following in his footsteps, Miss Lounsbery greeted her. She sprang to the car, her face wreathed in smiles, showing her joy and happiness at seeing Mrs. Church again.

"Oh, Mrs. Church, how glad I am to see you. I hope you are well. You see we were worried not hearing of or seeing you for so long." And then she hurried on. "By the way, at the last meeting of the society Miss Chitty appointed a committee of one to call on you and inquire the cause of your absence."

Madeline was moved by the great interest manifested.

"Oh, I feel quite well, Miss Lounsbery. You see I have had so many things to do and have been indisposed lately, that I could not attend the Mission." She stopped. And then she went on. It

was difficult; she didn't know what to say. She was anxious—she hesitated.

"Miss Lounsbery, tell me, how is Miss Chittenden? Is she well?" she inquired feelingly.

A sad look came into the eyes of the young woman. She seemed to have difficulty in answering.

"Why,—yes,—Miss Chitty is well; but didn't you know—her mother died last week?"

Then it was true! A great sob convulsed her; tears came into her eyes. Audrey's mother dead! Oh, it was terrible! And she not near her friend in her great sorrow! Madeline hadn't the strength to go on, but she knew she must say something.

"Oh, it is awful; it is terrible." She wiped her eyes. "Tell me, what ailed Mrs. Chittenden? She was well a week or two before."

Miss Lounsbery was quick to inform her. "Why, she hadn't been ill. It seems that Miss Chitty and Mr. Benton were at the Mission that evening, and later called at Mrs. McCarthy's on their way home. While they were there, a boy rushed up and told them that Mrs. Chittenden was dying; they hurried home, but it was too late. She had passed away a moment before. They say she died of heart trouble induced by old age."

Madeline could think only of Audrey's great sorrow. She inquired as to the doings at the Mission, thanked her informer and ordered the chauffeur to drive home.

In the half hour that it consumed to drive home, Madeline had ample time in which to think of

Audrey's loneliness and her sorrow. It pained her. She determined to have it out with her husband when she reached home. She must go to Audrey now. This changed everything. And then she considered. No, she would let the matter rest until morning so far as her husband was concerned, but she decided to write Audrey immediately upon her return. She knew words could be no balm to a sorrow so great as hers, yet she felt that a word might not be taken amiss.

After thinking, she reached the conclusion that that was the best to do, and that then in the morning she would speak to her husband. She felt sure that she could persuade him to look at things in a different light in view of the present condition. At any rate, matters had not been going nicely with her domestic affairs—her husband was not what he formerly was, and she thought it was about time that an understanding should be reached. Her husband must simply permit her to call on her friend, and if not, well——

CHAPTER XIII.

Since that awful night a few weeks before, Madeline had but little to say to her husband. Their relations were strained.

On his part it seemed to concern him little.

Of course, he admitted to himself that he had behaved badly. But don't many a man go as far? His spending that evening with his old chum, Jack Hemingway, in company with two young women friends—friends of his earlier bachelor days—was, of course, stretching the conventionalities. But a man's passions, nature and pleasures must be satisfied.

Of late many a cirmumstance arose to give him reason to meditate. He found that his wife was sometimes stubborn, in fact unreasonably so. It seemed as though they had agreed to disagree. Everything seemed to go wrong. What was the difficulty? What was the trouble?

And then why is it that a woman can never comprehend that a man's mind cannot always be on his home? He has business worries—worries that sometimes are so great as to drive a weak man insane. A wife believes all her husband has to do is to look to her comfort, give her all she requires, satisfy her every desire. She seems never to stop and wonder where the ways and means are to come from with which to give her all she wants of worldly goods.

He had reached the period in life when a man stops to realize that there is another time in life other than the present. There is the *future*. The yesterday of life was gone, never to return—very well—but the to-morrow! What of that? Jesse Church was a thinking man in this respect. He was ambitious to rise higher in the world of somebodies and somethings. Lately he had been unreasonably worried. Business was not as it should have been. His outside investments were turning out badly. His speculation in the money market had been of late other than he would have wished it to be. He knew that if the present cost of living was to continue, something must be done—curtail that expense, as he had gradually reduced the running

cost of his business. And if he must decrease the volume of his business, he was determined that his wife must carry on the household with a smaller sum than she had been receiving.

He had been frequently at the Club of late. It was possibly due to the indispostion of his wife to accompany him to other places. She had stated so often that she didn't consider herself in proper condition to appear in public, that he had frequently gone alone. Some little of the time he remained at home with her.

This morning found him in an ugly mood, his temper almost beyond control. He had many business appointments for the day, and was anxious to be away. He had also made an appointment with a business acquaintance to take him on a motor trip in the afternoon; it was simply for business reasons; and he felt that he was compelled to comply. Therefore, he had only the morning to transact office matters.

He came down to breakfast only to find that his wife was already awaiting him. He was surprised, and showed it. It was an unusual occurrance to have his wife waiting for him in the morning. A glance at her, and he was aware that something out of the ordinary had occurred.

They always kissed each morning. They still retained that one act of their sweetheart days. But the custom of doing the same at night had been forgotten many a time since they had married.

"Good morning, Madeline."

"Good morning, Jesse."

And they sat down to breakfast.

Madeline could not resist the temptation to launch immediately into the topic which interested her most. She was anxious to have it over, with the hope that at the end, she would have her husband's consent to call on Audrey.

"Jesse, have you heard the dreadful news?"

And as he looked up at her he laid down his knife and fork. Before he could speak, she went on:

"Audrey Chittenden's mother is dead; died a week ago."

He was genuinely sorry. That could be told from his expression of face and the tone with which he answered. "No, Madeline, you can't mean it."

There was a dimness in her eye as she said: "Yes, Jesse, it is only too true."

And he inquired: "But how did you learn of it?" His face darkened.

He seemed to be relieved when she explained. He trusted his wife, for he knew of no reason to doubt her word.

She also noticed his relief.

They said nothing, but continued their breakfast. They had almost finished when Madeline considered it time to take up the matter of her contemplated visit to Audrey.

"Listen, Jesse, I intend to call on Audrey to-day and pay her my respects. I want to extend to her my consolation and sympathy in person," she informed him.

not have the opportunity of discussing the subject with her. If any one at that moment would have suggested to him under what dramatic conditions and how near in the future she would see her, he would not have believed it.

"Good bye, Madeline. I must get to the office early this morning as I have a busy day before me," he said.

So she waited for his return. He came in again and went over to her. He stood looking down at her. "Is there anything else?" he said.

"Yes, there's a little matter of my using the machine this afternoon, Jesse. I promised to take our neighbor for a drive," she answered.

"That's all right; take it to-morrow, Madeline. I must have the car to-day. I have a business acquaintance whom I promised I would take with his party sometime ago. And business comes before neighbors, you know," he commented.

It seemed to her that everything she wanted to do her husband had objected to.

"Oh, Jesse, order a taxicab for your friend," she replied testily.

"Order a taxi!" he exclaimed. "Why, I'd look ridiculous driving them out in a taxi, when they know I have my private car."

"Well then," said Madeline, "order a private machine. I've simply got to have ours."

He was astonished. Her words impressed him with the feeling that she didn't care about his business at all.

He realized it would be useless to argue with her.

"Very well, go ahead. I'll get another car," he answered. And then he went on: "I must be going now, Madeline. I'm late, and I have a big day before me. I hope you'll feel better later."

Her first thought now was of her husband's unreasonable persistence in wanting the car, their own private car, to take out business friends. Especially when he knew her delicate condition, and that it was absolutely necessary that she should have a careful driver. It seemed to her that he was becoming less thoughtful of her health, and more disinterested in her happiness.

His other little acts of abuse and carelessness came to her mind. He behaved as though his home was of little comfort to him, so often lately did he find excuse or reason for going out evenings. His feeling toward her was also becoming strained. She remembered now in many ways in which he failed to be kind to her. Formerly, if she had asked him to send around the machine to her home, he never thought of refusing. His regular evenings to call, he would always make sure to come; and if she, for some reason or other, suggested that he call another night, he would insinuate that she must always have something more important to do.

Time was, when he was invited to dine with her at her home; he never criticized the food. Now, it was impossible to suit his fancy. In the matter of dress, why that too, had become a burden to him. He would argue and refuse because business was

bad, or that she had plenty of clothes, and that he must curtail his expenses; wear her old clothes—new ones he could not afford.

So, she too, as he had before her, determined that the time for decision and settlement had arrived. They must come to an understanding. She could not live on this way; she was not accustomed to it. When she was single and lived home, she was happy. And she didn't marry for the worse.

Happy? Why she had given up the hope that she would ever be ideally happy as she had looked forward to. That night, weeks before, when her husband had returned home in the early hours of the morning, intoxicated. Would she ever forget that night? For a married man to stay out nights, she considered treacherous, disrespectful, and the subject for endless gossip and slander. She had lost much of the great respect and love she once possessed for him. Love? She didn't believe now she had ever loved him. Yet, what feeling of safety, what feeling of belief, what feeling of affection she ever entertained for him, she could not now explain. And still, she told herself, if there hadn't been something greatly pronounced in her heart for him, she would never have married him.

Was married life really so lived that but little pleasure, but little happiness was to be attained by it? Were all husbands and wives living the same kind of strained existence, always at ends with each other? And was their outward happiness only a disguise; only an attempt to prevent their friends

and neighbors from learning the true state of affairs—their real home life?

If such was, however, generally the situation and condition among married folks, she, at least, could not and *would* not live such an existence. It was wearing her away—making an old woman of her before her time.

If they couldn't agree to agree, then the only course left for them was to agree to disagree. And it seemed as though they had been doing the latter ever since they married. She decided that she would be far better off away from his criticism, his cruelty and their miserable home.

She was, therefore, determined that at a near future date, she would take up this matter of living with her husband, and if amicable arrangements could not be entered into, then she would separate fromh him, *a mensa et thoro,* from bed and board. Let him live by himself and she would go home to her mother. He could provide for her and the child, their child; and away from each other he might be brought to reflect how hard and unreasonable he had been with her.

Through all her moments of meditation and reminiscence, she failed to consider that possibly much of the cause of the dissatisfaction and disagreement existing between her husband and herself might be due to some conduct of her own, and that her husband was not altogether to blame for the present condition of affairs. Maybe she had been unreasonable at times, and that exaction

irritated him. Recently her husband's time had been taken up greatly outside of the home. Maybe he had just cause for worry and anxiety in his business. Maybe it was she who was asking and demanding too much of him.

The likelihood was, that each was partly to blame. They had each in any case decided in their own minds that something must be done; they could not go on in the way they were now living.

At two o'clock that afternoon, Mrs. Gondoles called at the house. Madeline received her with a smile on her face and apparent joy with the expectation of a pleasant afternoon in her company. The machine was waiting at the door; they entered it, and drove off.

Not a sign, paradoxical as it was, in Madeline's face or in her conduct gave Mrs. Gondoles any reason to believe that her home life was other than idealy happy.

That is, however, simply the deceitfulness of the world to-day. Whether it is due to the fact that one is jealous of one's own misfortune to the extent of taking acquaintances into one's confidence, or whether it is due to a feeling of pride, or due to an objection to receiving the luke-warm sympathy of these friends, or due to the feeling that one does not want one's acquaintances to exult in one's misery, it is hard to say.

Possibly the reader can answer satisfactorily for himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

On November 1st, Audrey Chittenden returned to her duties as private secretary for Mr. Frederick R. Stockholm. The morning she arrived at the office, she was welcomed enthusiastically by her fellow employees.

"Good morning, Miss Chittenden," said Mr. Stockholm, "I hope you are well. But I guess that must be so or you would not have returned?" He smiled. "I want to prepare you for a most strenuous day. We're very busy and I certainly did regret your absence. I never so much appreciated your services." He spoke with sincerity.

"Well, Mr. Stockholm, I can only say that I'm happy to be back. I'm ready for all the hard work that's coming," she replied.

"This morning, particularly, will be a heavy one, Miss Chittenden. There is to be a secret conference here this morning. I need not suggest to you the importance of it, or warn you of the secrecy which must be observed. Only let me say that fortunes are involved and that the subject and result of the meeting is of great concern."

He proceeded: "The gentlemen in the conference are to meet in the private office. I want you to conceal yourself in the ante-room. You know what your work will be then. Listen to every word that is spoken. Endeavor to learn the identity of the speakers, and make your notes in the form of dialogue, but do not write the names of the individuals; simply signify them by numerals. When you have transcribed your work, place it in the private safe, and then let me know when the notes are ready for my perusal."

She knew what these so termed "secret conferences" meant. She had performed the same service many times before, and had been as often an unknown and hidden witness to the deliberations of grave proceedings.

"Very well, Mr. Stockholm; I understand."

Half an hour later she was called to the important transaction of the day. With book and pencil, she sat prepared in the anteroom for the conference soon to begin.

Someone was speaking. She started! She had heard that voice often before; she knew its owner. He must be the spokesman or chairman of the gathering. She listened, and soon her pencil was flying over the pages of her note book on her lap.

"Gentlemen, you are aware of the purposes of this meeting. I need not go into the subject. The fewer words said, the better. Are you ready, gentlemen? Shall we proceed?"

Another voice. She heard a name mentioned.

"But Mr. Chairman, I note that there is an absentee. Possibly his sponser can speak for him, and account for his failure to attend."

Another speaker; apparently the gentleman referred to by the previous member, as the one to account for the failure of the absentee to be present.

"Mr. Chairman, I can only say that our friend will be here. He may have been detained, but I am sure he will come."

The one mentioned as the chairman. "That reminds me." Evidently addressing the last speaker. "I left it to you, Senator, to see that this stranger would be here, and that he is O. K. You know, he is a chip of the old block—his father before him would never have countenanced the object of this meeting." He paused. "And I have a fear that his son, will not. Are you sure of him?"

The addressed: "He's all right; you needn't worry about him joining us. I've seen him; put the deal to him straight, and he informed me that if everything was as I said, he would pull with us."

The chairman: "Very well; we'll let it go at that."

Silence. Then a door must have opened, for Audrey, secreted in her little compartment, heard it close, followed by strange voices.

"Glad to see you,——. We're waiting for you, to go on. I am told that you understand with what object and for what purpose this meeting was called." Again the chairman.

A medley of voices. "How do you do?" "Good morning," "Hope you are well."

The chairman again. "Now, gentlemen, let us proceed to business."

Interruption by a strange voice; apparently the new comer. At the sound of his voice Audrey straightened up. She must have known him.

He was speaking. "Gentlemen. The Senator here approached me in this matter; told me some facts, and the object of the call, and asked me for my assistance. I told him that he could count on my joining you." Silence. Then the speaker continued. "But, gentlemen, I would like to hear a little more of this affair; I want to be sure of my way, and what I am expected to agree to."

The Chairman. "I suppose I am empowered to speak for all of you gentlemen." A pause. "This call was sent for the purpose of bringing together the men who hold and control the majority of the minority stock of the Gold Eagle Mining Company of Montana. The majority of the stock of the corporation just named is controlled, and held on mar-

gin by a gentleman whom it is unnecessary to mention at this time. I am sure we all know him."

Audrey heard the chairman's voice again.

"Now, sir, the primary and principal object of this meeting is to secure the organization of that body of men who, as I said before, control and hold the majority of the minority stock of that company, or who hold proxies, looking toward the accomplishment of two points. We all feel that the time has come to teach a certain gentleman a lesson in high finance—to play the game as he has always played it to his own glory and profit. That is one thing. The other and more important reason, is for our own personal and mutual individual gain. The third is a minor consideration; seeking the control, as he has held it, of this corporation. The means through which we intend and expect to obtain the second are in our possession at the present time. By reason of financial considerations and other imperative means we have been able to obtain a private and positive knowledge as to the secret wealth of this mining property. This latter information has given us the facts which we consider absolutely essential for our own protection and for the realization of hundreds of thousands of dollars without any danger to ourselves, and at the same time to take away from the one I have already named, the control of this organization, which he now possesses.

"We know also that this gentleman does not own the stock he holds outright, but on margin as I stated before. And we know further that he has

speculated to so great an extent in the Street for the purposes of his own private gain as to have the value of the stock gradually rise. With this last object in view he has purchased shares which do not exist and sold others he does not own.

"Now, we intend to 'bear' the market. We intend to force the price on this stock down—down as low as twenty—and to-day it is quoted at one twenty-three—until we have broken this man. We know that to hold his present interests, and keep himself from a general assignment and bankruptcy, he will find it absolutely necessary to use every dollar he actually owns and can call—and more. And this extra he won't be able to obtain, because we have agreed, or rather, are about to agree, among ourselves and those institutions we control, not to advance him one dollar in cash, no matter how good his security. Nor do we intend to loan money to him through any of his brokers; we know them all. And I may say, without fear of contradiction, that if we refuse to let him have the cash he will find it impossible to secure it elsewhere; for we control the money market of this city. I may say of this country.

"When he has been forced to the wall; when he is down and out of the control of Gold Eagle Mining; and when the stock has dropped to twenty, then we'll stop hammering it, by ceasing to throw our interests into the market, but not until then. When it has reached twenty, however, the 'bear' movement comes to an end. Then we 'bull' it;

buy in every share that is obtainable. It will then be a simple matter to purchase sufficient with which to control the corporation, at the low figures of twenty, or if it rises at our 'bull' movement, at thirty or forty. It has already been agreed among us as to how many shares are allotted to each of us. On the basis of equality, you, sir, have been given a like number. That is all, sir.

"Remember, gentlemen, when Gold Eagle Mining reaches twenty as reported on the floor of the Exchange, that that figure is the signal for buying; remember, for buying. Do it slowly, gradually, you understand? Not too fast. It might send the price up, when outsiders learn the 'bear' movement is over; up too quickly for us to recover ourselves." He stopped.

Another speaker. "But, Mr. Chairman, how are we to know that the opposition is out?"

The chairman. "The opposition will be out and bankrupted long before the price has dropped to the bottom—of that I am sure; and when I learn of it through the secret channels I control, in advance of the public learning of it, I will inform you gentlemen by cipher."

The voice of the stranger for the second time. "But, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen; am I to understand that this is simply an attempt to bankrupt the foremost operator of the day? Am I to understand that through the evident treachery of one of the corporation's mining experts, who has given you the present condition of that company's

property, you intend to take advantage of that information and profit accordingly; and am I to understand that you either forced or purchased this knowledge with that intention?"

The chairman speaks the answer. "That is about the situation; you have inferred correctly, sir."

And the stranger went on. "Then gentlemen, have you stopped to consider what the drop in the quoted value of the securities of this corporation, and the natural effect it will have on others, will mean to the small speculator, the investor on a small scale; the widow and the orphan?"

The tone of the chairman showed that gentleman's impatience. "Why, sir, we have no quarrel with them; we have no concern for them. If they decide to gamble or invest their all in 'the Street' they must take the consequences: When our own interests are involved, we cannot stop to consider whether they are to be losers or not by the movement, sir."

Audrey had ceased writing. She heard nothing. All was quiet.

Then she heard the stranger speak again. "I have no wish to crawl out of my bargain or endeavor to find excuse for changing my word, but, gentlemen, this is something I had not anticipated. I was not given to understand that this movement was to be such a momentus one, the result of trickery and treachery, and to mean a sure disaster to hundreds of persons who can ill afford to sustain a loss they are sure to meet——"

The chairman interrupted: "You would not wish

us to advertise our intentions, sir?" he queried, in a tone which showed his astonishment.

"No, gentlemen, I suppose not," replied the stranger. "But," he went on, "that does not change the impression I had received from your emissary. If I understood your representative rightly, this enterprise was to be a legitimate, honest and clean proposition. I did not know, nor was I told, that under-handed methods had been used with which to obtain the information you have received, and which we have no right to; and if we have that right as stockholders in that corporation, to use it in the manner you gentlemen propose." He stopped.

"I do not consider it a clean transaction," he resumed, "and I must say, gentlemen, that you must excuse me; permit me to withdraw the promise I made, although I do not consider my statement a promise in the circumstances. I cannot and will not, gentlemen, make myself a party to any such dealings. I consider them criminal, if not in the eyes of the law, certainly morally, and a crime perpetrated on our fellow man."

Audrey sat still, awaiting the next words. But they did not come immediately. Alone and thinking, she would have given much she possessed to have seen into the room adjoining. The tension must have been great; the scene a dramatic one. For minutes all was quiet.

Then she heard the chairman address those present. "Gentlemen, I regret that the Senator failed to make himself clear to the gentleman. This situa-

tion is a most unfortunate one." A pause. "I have no criticism to make of the gentleman on my right, or of his evident opinion as to how great financial problems are handled. Whether he shall make himself one of us is a question which must necessarily be answered by him. He is the sole judge of, and will be held strictly accountable to a degree for, his own actions. And he declines to associate himself with us." Another pause. "But for our own protection and the safety of our interests, in this enterprise, we must, I feel sure, be relieved of the possibility that what has passed here this morning will not become public property, or that he will in any way take advantage of his knowledge learned here to the detriment of those interests." Still another pause. "If the gentleman will assure us of so much, he is at liberty to leave. His word is quite sufficient."

The stranger, after an apparent pause: "Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I too, regret the unfortunate circumstances. While I cannot conscienciously bring myself to join with you in this enterprise, I give you my word, that so far as I am concerned, I will make no attempt to disclose what has been transacted here this morning, or even to the slightest degree take advantage of my knowledge for my personal benefit. So far as I am concerned, this matter is closed."

The chairman is heard. "Thank you, sir, and I accept your word as a gentleman of honor; I know my associates will agree with me when I say I be-

lieve I only voice their sentiments in accepting your word."

And then the stranger: "You may rest assured, gentlemen, that I shall respect your confidence."

Audrey heard the door close. She waited impatiently for the rest. It was not long in coming. The door had only closed, presumably on the stranger, when she heard a voice.

"Well, of all the consummate jackasses and veriest damn fools, you take the prize, Senator. I appointed you as go-between for us, believing you had some brains. I see, however, I was wrong. I don't think you'd have sense enough to move out of the way of a car if you saw it coming along."

The voice was loud, and Audrey knew that the owner of it was angry—mad clear through.

The senator was speaking; his tone was appealing. "Why, Mr. Chairman, I told the young idiot just what you told me to. I went over the entire proposition and to my mind, very clearly. All I can say is, he's either too damn thick, or else he's playing us for suckers."

"No, he isn't playing us for suckers. He's not that sort. He's like his father before him—a chip of the old block! He gave his word and we needn't worry; he's pledged himself to secrecy and he'll keep that pledge inviolate. I know it." The chairman had spoken.

The Senator asks a question: "Well, what are we going to do now? He owns a considerable block of the shares of the Gold Eagle stock which he

inherited from his father, and by staying on the outside, may prevent us from manipulating the deal."

"Never mind talking like a fool, and asking fool questions: what are we going to do, and when, and how, and a half dozen other similar nothings. You've done enough mischief for a while." Another speaker had made himself heard. "We'll leave it to the chairman," he suggested, concluding.

The chairman had the floor again. "Now, gentlemen, go it easy. No quarreling. I'll agree that the Senator has put us 'in dutch,' so to speak, but then it might have been far worse. At least, we've got the consolation to know that we've been dealing with a man, and a man who will stick to his word until Hell freezes over. I'm not fearful of anything leaking out through him." A pause, as though thinking before going on.

"I guess we'll get along without him, anyway, but, of course, I'd have rather had him with us." Another pause. "We can go ahead with the programme as laid out. Remember, gentlemen, with the opening of the Exchange to-morrow, Gold Eagle Mining is to be thrown into the market; blocks of it, every share we hold; keep on throwing it in until we smash the market, and take the bottom out of Gold Eagle. I must impress upon you, not a let up until you hear twenty quoted, and no takers, and then as it just touches that figure, and remains swinging a little below and a little above, you understand—buy. And don't take up in blocks, either, but gradually, slowly at first, then heavier,

until it reaches forty; after that to the extent of your respective limits. I need not remind you, that God help the man of us, who goes against his signed agreement and pledged word. That agreement I hold in the private safe of my office, and the first man, well——"

He came to a stop.

Someone else was speaking. "Then it's all agreed, gentlemen? At the opening of the Exchange to-morrow? We all have our signed agreements, have we? And our list of shares? To make sure, let us compare statements, gentlemen."

Audrey heard no more for the next fifteen minutes. She was happy and smiled. She sat soliloquizing. "So, at last the 'Big Six' had found a man they could not force to become one of them; not even for the thousands of dollars' gain it would bring him." And so she sat, playfully marking with the pencil she held in her hand.

Suddenly, she heard the voice of the chairman. She became all attention.

"Well, gentlemen, if there is nothing more to say, and everything is agreed, and satisfactorily so, we'll adjourn," he suggested.

No one broke the silence when he had finished.

Again Audrey heard the chairman. "There being no further business, gentlemen, this meeting stands adjourned, at the call of the chair," he ordered.

She heard a shuffling of feet and a general movement in the room adjoining. Also a mingling of voices, but she could not discern what was said.

Occasionally, she caught a word or two, and quickly made a memorandum thereof at the foot of her notes. Her orders were to take down every word, and she carried out her instructions to the letter.

Finally the noises ceased entirely, and all was quiet. But she sat on, never moving from her position at the desk. She was waiting for something, and she knew what was to come, would. It would only be a minute or two now.

At last she heard the buzz of a push button, and she knew she had received the signal she had been waiting for. It was the sign for her retirement. Her duties were over for that particular occasion.

She returned to Mr. Stockholm, who was awaiting her. This fact pleased her because she had something to say to him of her private affairs.

As she entered he looked up at her.

"Well, Miss Chittenden, what did you think of it?" he questioned.

She answered: "It's not for me to say, Mr. Stockholm. I know so little of your business in such great undertakings."

He was amused. "But, Miss Chittenden," he reminded her, "you have been here for some years now, and I guess you know something of my method, eh?"

She knew he was speaking only the truth.

She declined to enter into a discussion of the problem. However, a word or two as to the posi-

tion she took, she thought would not be presumed amiss. So she replied:

"Yes, it is true, Mr. Stockholm, that I am acquainted with your methods, but I consider it little of my business to really study them. I don't ever expect to become a great financier, you know." She laughed.

So did he. Then he became serious. "But what do you think of that young idiot? You know who I mean. Why he stood to realize thousands of dollars," he disgustingly questioned.

Her brow clouded a little. "Well, Mr. Stockholm, if you ask me what I think of him, I must answer you that if he believes he is doing what is right, it was the only thing for him to do."

Her employer realized that she was serious and sincere. He was amazed. He believed that the great schooling Audrey Chittenden had received in his financial institution, should have taught her there was but one way to transact business; and that was *successfully*.

He evidently neglected to remind himself that his secretary might have her own opinions.

"Oh, you may be right, young lady, and I really think you are; and you would be if we were living in the last century. But the difficulty is, we are not. We're living in to-day. And to-day is much different from fifty or a hundred years ago. Now, you take this young fellow, for instance. His father before him became a millionaire here in the 'Street,' and I'll admit the old fellow was the squar-

est, the straightest, cleanest and most honest financier the country could boast of. I'll further concede, that he would never have countenanced such a deal or arrangement as was put through this morning. I knew him in his declining years and I never knew a better man. I'd carry on business in the same way, if I could. You believe that, Miss Chittenden, don't you?"

"But I can't do it. My competitors would have me 'down and out' before I could pull myself together. That's the way the forge deals. And don't you know that if our friend of the opposition had the opportunity of doing what we propose to do, in another transaction, don't you know that he would? He wouldn't consider us, or anyone else. Therefore, I must do as others are doing, and will do. I must protect myself, my family. I do it all for them, though I admit I love the authority, the power, and the excitement of it all." He paused, while his eyes told how deeply he was touched. "But I love my little ones more," he concluded.

His face took on the glow which tells of love returned and accepted.

He continued: "Well, Miss Chittenden, it's over now, so let's say no more of it." Then he continued warningly: "By the way, have those notes transcribed before you leave this evening, as I want them by that time, and place them in the safe—you have the combination."

"Very well, sir. I'll attend to it."

Then she paused. She still remained standing

in front of his desk. She wanted to say something, but did not know how to begin.

Noting her indecision, he remarked:

"Is there anything else, Miss Chittenden?"

She looked at him.

"Mr. Stockholm, you've been more than kind to me for the many years I have been with you; there's nothing more you can do for me, sir."

She really regretted to leave her work, she liked it so well, but she knew Bob would not listen to further objection and refusal—and then she had promised him. So she went on. "I'm going to resign, Mr. Stockholm, but with your permission my resignation is not to take effect before January 1 next. I wouldn't think of leaving you without giving you ample time to replace me."

Mr. Stockholm appeared as though amazed. He didn't reply, but simply looked at Audrey with open mouth. He couldn't think of her leaving him; to him she was like one of his own; in a friendly way he loved her, and in a business light, he knew, he could never equal her.

"But, Miss Chittenden, why this resolution? Why sever our relations? Isn't the remuneration sufficient for your needs? If, not, I'll advance your salary. Or is it that your duties are becoming distasteful to you—irksome, and monotonous? Tell me; there must be some good reason, for I feel sure you'd never leave otherwise."

"There is a very good reason, Mr. Stockholm, of that you may be sure. As I have already said, there

is nothing you could give me more than I have today; that would be a sufficiently strong inducement for me to stay; and there is no existing condition here that forces me to do as I intend. Mr. Stockholm, you know mother died——," her voice broke.

"Yes, I know, little woman, I know. I was awfully sorry for you. The loss of a mother is the greatest bereavement in the world."

She dried a tear drop in her eye. "Well, you know I am now alone. I'm lonely, quite lonely, and I——"

He thought he knew the trouble. "Oh, that's it, is it? You've found the man; he's captured you, has he; and you can't withstand his entreaties, eh?"

"I'm afraid that's it," she replied shyly.

The man who would possess Audrey Chittenden, he hoped would be worthy of her. He knew her to be a splendid woman, loving and lovable, kind and thoughtful; and one who looked ahead to the future. Loath to have her go, yet if it meant her happiness, he would not and could not object.

"Very well, little woman, if it means your happiness, go; and with you take my blessing; may you ever know joy, and may sorrow pass you without leaving its mark. I only hope that the man to whom you give your heart may be worthy of you."

She smiled. The thought of her Bob caused her to feel that she had not chosen wrong. "I'm sure he will always cherish me, and I know he is worthy of the little I can give him," she replied, a great joy coming over her.

CHAPTER XV.

The following morning Jesse Church arrived at his office at 9:15 o'clock.

He was more than ordinarily worried recently, owing to his financial condition. His large investments in the stock market were held on margin, a dangerous form of speculation. If the market should suddenly come within the clutches of a "bear" movement, and he had not sufficient cash or securities on which to realize ready money, to meet the possible demand of his brokers for additional margin, knew he must lose all.

His ambition was to become a millionaire, and he realized that in the ordinary pursuits of a business life, it was impossible to become the possessor of a million dollars in a legitimate way. It may have been possible years ago, but not now. Therefore, he became tempted to speculate—and he did. And now he knew he was "up against it," to use a slang phrase.

The market had been somewhat depressed for the past week, and his brokers had been continually dunning him for more margin. He met their demands, though reluctantly, and it cost him the loss of many hundreds of dollars. He found it absolutely necessary to sacrifice considerable of his best securities to obtain the money. But he had gone the limit, had no more to dispose of; and he lived in the fear that any hour his brokers would make another request.

The night before he had remained up until the early hours of the morning. The great nervous strain under which he was laboring, kept him feverish and uneasy. The sun was streaming its rays through the window and into his room when he stood on his feet. He looked at his watch and saw that the time was 8.30. He hastily dressed, and without breakfast, left for his office. The telephone girl was astonished to see her employer come so early, for figuratively speaking, he flew in.

As soon as he had taken off his coat, he pushed the button for his chief clerk.

Mr. Clements came in. "You called me, sir?" He respectfully addressed his employer.

"Of course I did, you idiot; what do you think I wanted?"

Clements knew better than to answer the boss when he was in this mood.

"Now remember, Clements, I'm not to be disturbed by anyone, understand? You may go!"

The first thing he did was to look at his correspondence, which heaped his desk. He picked up a letter and noting the address on the envelope, gave a start. He immediately knew it was a communication from his brokers. As he expected, it was a very polite private note from the senior member of the firm, a friend of many years and with whom he was personally well acquainted, informing him that his margin was gone, and that before the opening of the Exchange that morning it would be absolutely necessary for him to deposit additional cash for further security to avoid "closing out."

At last the crash had come! He decided to lose every dollar he had speculated thus far, and at worst, save a little out of the ruin; let them sell him out now for his own protection later.

He looked at his watch; the time was 9:45. He had fifteen minutes in which to communicate with his brokers. He called Clements.

"I'm going down to my brokers; I'll be there for about half an hour; if anyone calls, tell them to wait or come in later; if important, ring me up."

Clements endeavored to speak. "Mr. Church——"

And Mr. Church shouted at him. "Don't bother me, you fool; can't you understand what I say?"

His chief clerk stammered. "But, Mr. Church—"

"Well, what the hell is the 'but'; come, out with it."

Clements looked at the boss as though he thought he had gone insane. It was very seldom that his chief used profane language.

"Mr. Church, someone telephoned ten minutes ago; he wouldn't say what his name was or anything about himself. He wouldn't talk with you direct; he was absolutely insistent on that point. But he emphasized every word he said, and told me not to miss a syllable. He told me to tell you, sir, very emphatically, that he knew your present financial predicament; that he knew your brokers were about to close you out, and that you had little with which to protect yourself; that if you had any other resources you should not put up any more margin; that the market was going to smash within the next few days; that you must let them sell you out, and realize as much as you could out of the crash. Then, and in this he was most particular, you must get every dollar you could obtain—dispose of every property you possessed, no matter what it consisted of—within the next day or two. Then you are to watch the market closely. As soon as a certain stock was quoted at twenty, you are to buy, and buy, and buy every share you could lay your hands on. That there existed a certain combination for the destruction of this corporation; that this combination is composed of a certain number of men who have organized with the purpose of 'bearing' this stock down to twenty, and then 'bull' the market and bring it back to its real value. He would say no more."

"Well, you idiot, what was the name of the stock he mentioned?" he bellowed, interrupting Clements.

"Gold Eagle Mining." His employer opened his

eyes in astonishment. Clements continued. "He said you were to buy after the stock dropped to twenty, and that if you held any of it now, not to sell it. He said it would then go over one twenty-five, and if you wanted to sell and get clean, to sell when it reached that figure, but not before."

He gasped: "All right Clements; I'm going down to the brokers anyway, and I'll be back in half an hour."

A half hour later he returned and locked himself in his private office.

His brokers he had instructed to "sell out," and leave as much as they could for him. They did it while he was yet in their office; what was left he could not tell at this time. He had closely looked at the tape while there, and learned that Gold Eagle Mining had dropped. Somebody was behind the "bear movement" on it he felt sure. And he knew that his information, so mysteriously received over the telephone by his chief clerk must be authentic and reliable.

He wondered. He called Clements again. "You said you couldn't obtain an identification of the person speaking?"

"No, sir," answered Clements. "He refused to leave his name."

Jesse Church was puzzled. He knitted his brows. He couldn't think of anyone who could be so friendly to him, who could know of his financial danger and also be in a position of obtaining such information.

"But, Clements," he interrogated. "You say the voice speaking was that of a man?"

"Yes, sir; a man," replied the clerk respectfully.

A man! He endeavored to bring to his mind all the men friends he knew. When he finished, he was no nearer a solution than when he began. Jesse Church was deliberating as only one in his present position must. Who could possibly know his private affairs so intimately and also have such evident responsible information of the doings of the "big men" in "the Street?" For he was satisfied, to manipulate a deal like the one proposed, the "ring" must be a strong and mighty one.

He at last gave it up as useless. Try as he would, he could not imagine who his mysterious benefactor was.

And as he sat thus soliloquizing, he little knew under what dramatic circumstances he would learn the identity of the "unknown." He little dreamed at what early future his present curiosity and desire for knowledge would be gratified.

He went to the safe, and taking out his securities, found that of the Gold Eagle Mining he held two thousand shares. A memorandum attached to the certificates reminded him that he had paid 82⅝ for them. These, of course, he decided to retain at all costs. Of the others he found good interests which remained the same within five to ten points, no matter what the condition of the market.

He determined to stake all on the information at hand. He would dispose of every stock he owned,

those and others, all except the Gold Eagle Mining, and realize as much cash as he could obtain. This money he would hold as a reserve fund until the day that Gold Eagle dropped to twenty, and then buy every share he could lay hands on. Naturally, from his many years of experience, he knew the ways of "the Street," and he was shrewd enough to be careful not to plunge too quickly at first, as the purchasing orders might force the price up—even on his little buying. So he would buy gradually and moderately, but surely.

* * * * * * *

That evening Bob called for Audrey at her place of business, in his car, as they had arranged.

They drove to a well known Broadway restaurant, a pretty little place under ground, within a stone's throw of Herald Square. In its decorations it was a counterpart of The Inn in the Catskills. It's ceiling—the sidewalk—was low; covering it were leaves interwoven with bunches of grapes hanging from among them; tiny electric lights twinkled from out of the imitation greens; the tables were small—arranged for twos and fours—and set apart from one another so that the diners might sit in comparative seclusion; electroliers stood on the tables; the floor was handsomely carpeted, and the posts or columns within the place were constructed of bronze and highly carved, mostly in a Roman fashion, which was at once historic and restful. The majority of the patrons were "regulars." They loved the coziness of the pretty place, its air of comfort and ease,

and the privacy which could not be obtained in any other public hostelry in the great city.

Bob's table was always reserved for him. The proprietor knew his "regulars," and never failed to show his thoughtful courtesy in each and every care and detail. When Bob and Audrey entered, they were immediately greeted by him and placed comfortably at their table.

They were sipping their coffee, when suddenly Bob changed the subject of conversation.

"Now, Audrey, won't you tell me why——?" he began.

Audrey must have known to what he referred, and she quickly interrupted him.

"Don't, Bob, you know I asked you not to make me tell you now. I promise you I'll tell you some other time; please don't force me now. Won't you please me, dear?"

He surbed his curiosity and replied:

"Oh, very well, dear; I'll wait."

But she knew differently; she knew he was anxious.

"That's right, Bob. Wait, and you'll know," she said softly.

They sat for some time, enjoying the spirited renditions of the orchestra. They drank of the delicious wine for which the restaurant was renowned. Bob smoked. The time passed quickly, and they left with the very agreeable feelings in-

duced by good dining, good music and congenial companionship.

* * * * * * *

For the next few days "the Street" was in a panic. New York City and the markets of the world went mad. London, Paris and Berlin—none of their financiers could explain the cause of the great upheaval.

It was true the stock market had been entertaining a general decline. But the crash that followed the "bear" movement on Gold Eagle Mining, had never before been witnessed. Even the oldest operators threw up their hands in despair. What they feared most was their own ignorance, for the manipulations were going on in the dark. The effect of the run on Gold Eagle Mining was to cause the other mining stocks to crumble, with a corresponding condition in railroad and industrial securities.

The floor of the New York Stock Exchange on Broad Street was the scene of great and wild disorder. For a battle it was, and a royal one, too. The brokers went crazy, bellowing and shouting their orders, their clothes torn in the struggle. The galleries became so congested that the officials feared a collapse of the structure. Immediately, orders were issued to lock the doors, and beginning with the opening of the Exchange on the following day, admission to the galleries could be obtained only by card.

One failure after another was announced on the

largest firms, he felt assured of the result. By the manipulations of the past few days he recognized the powers of the "big men." He was certain then that his information had been absolutely authentic. He followed the advice of his mysterious friend and disposed of every security he held, except Gold Eagle. He "got in" before the final crash came, and realized a fair value on his holdings.

It was only when the stock gradually neared the twenty mark that he became unbearably uneasy and nervous; the strain was now telling on him.

During these few days he had spoken but few words to his wife; she attributed the cause to the condition of the market, and rightly so. She knew her husband was deeply involved. So she was wise enough not to chide him.

By the time that the stock was quoted at twenty, Jesse Church was a physical wreck. He couldn't eat; he couldn't sleep; he couldn't think; he couldn't talk coherently.

What should he do? Commence buying, or wait? This was the crucial question. But his friend had told him to "go easy." So he decided to wait. He saw Gold Eagle swing at twenty, then drop almost a point and regain the loss. Then it stood steady; and he was relieved. He knew now that the "bull' movement was on.

A few days later Jesse Church had been rehabilitated; he had retreived his lost fortune, or rather, was about to. He had no doubts on that score. The game was being played as he had been

informed it would be, and he knew that now there could and would be no slip.

His struggle was over. *But whom to thank?* He had not found out, though he had made every effort. He concluded that for the time being his friend must remain an "unknown quantity." His undeliverable expressions of gratitude must be stored in his appreciative bosom.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Audrey, Audrey, I want you; come to me, Audrey; they must bring you to me."

Madeline Church had, in her pain and suffering, cried to see her friend. Nothing her husband could do succeeded in quieting her. She must have Audrey by her side.

"A-u-d-r-e-y, I need you. Bring her to me."

Madeline's mother, Mrs. Frothlind, at first endeavored to persuade her son-in-law to permit the coming of Audrey Chittenden to her daughter's bedside, and then she argued with him. But, finally, when she became satisfied that he was determined and that her daughter was also as persistent, she fought with him, and ended by insisting that Miss Chittenden be called.

But the husband remained firm throughout all argument. He replied that he could not conscienciously allow the bringing into his home of a woman he despised, and one whom the world must loathe.

He insisted that he could not permit a woman of such a character to sit by the bedside of his wife. But his position naturally could not move Madeline's mother. She threatened she would place the situation before the family physician, Dr. Carbery, who was in attendance.

She too, had known Miss Chittenden, "little Audie," since the child's birth, and even at this time when she had grown to womanhood, she loved her. True, she conceded, she might have committed a grave crime in her mode of living, but then, that was her own affair, it concerned none else. In the living of that life it inflicted no injury on another.

"Very well, mother," the husband had said, "we will leave the decision to Dr. Carbery, and what he decides I shall abide by."

The husband stood between a duty which he feared he must execute and a principle he had fought to live up to for over a year. What else could he do other than he had? He lived those hours in a paraoxsym of anxiety for his wife's health and fear for his principles.

How hard he had battled to keep that woman from the portals of his home! Was he to be cheated of his victory—a victory he thought so often he had won? It seemed so. In the present circumstances he could not argue or quarrel with a sick

woman—his wife, soon to become the mother of his child.

Later in the day Dr. Carbery returned to the bedside. He found his patient extremely nervous and restless. She continued to call for her friend of childhood's days.

He immediately called mother and husband.

"Who is the girl your wife is calling for?" he questioned.

Before Jesse could answer, Mrs. Frothlind addressed the doctor.

"She is a childhood chum of my daughter, doctor, and——"

Mrs. Frothlind described the situation that prevented Audrey's coming to the bed-side of her old friend.

The doctor was in a thoughtful mood. Then he said: "Certainly, send for the young lady at once, it is highly advisable."

It was under such dramatic conditions that Audrey Chittenden again saw her friend.

When she entered on tiptoes they embraced and cried with joy.

"Audrey—Audrey; you're here at last."

"Madeline—Madeline."

The affecting scene brought tears to the eyes of those in the room, but they said nothing, nor did they attempt to interrupt.

Dr. Carbery was pleased; Mrs. Frothlind was happy; Jesse Church was relieved.

The tears that came were tears of happiness. They kissed each other fervently.

The moment the mother had wanted, the moment the husband had never expected to arrive, was present.

That day Audrey never left the bedside of her friend, and as night came on, she refused to leave the room. She claimed it as a right, gained by a life long friendship.

Jesse Church never left the house during those trying hours of uneasiness and anxiety.

About eleven o'clock, Jesse Church had fallen into a troubled doze and woke with a start and was surprised to see Dr. Carbery standing over him looking down at him. "Get up—young fellow—it's all right; give me your hand; let me congratulate you; he's a bouncing baby boy."

Jesse piloted the old physician to another room, and opened a bottle of wine.

"To the youngster—Jesse Church, Jr., to be," the father cried in delirious happiness.

"To the youngster—Jesse Church, Jr., to be," was Dr. Carbery's returning toast.

CHAPTER XVII.

During the period of Madeline's convalescence, Audrey continued to call frequently.

These days were happy ones for her.

The subject of Audrey's association and friendship was still a thorn in Jesse's otherwise happy and sereneful mind. Yet he could not during those days or at the present time take the matter up again with his wife.

Madeline fondled the hope that their child would be the bridge that would cover any chasm of future discontent between them.

As the days passed, a strange situation arose. Husband and wife seemed to be drifting apart.

Something was wrong.

Of course, such a condition could not long endure without an open rupture. And it was not long in coming to the surface.

One evening while at supper the wife informed the husband that she expected Miss Chittenden to call, and spend the evening. The question as to that lady's continuing her visits had not been recently discussed.

"Now, listen, dear," he replied. "I have been more than lenient as regards Miss Chittenden's calling here." During the past few weeks he had always spoken of her as "Miss Chittenden." "I have refrained from referring to the matter, a thing very distasteful to me. And I must admit only because you have been ill and weak. Now you are well again, and I must again insist that she be not invited here. I will not tolerate it."

Madeline knew that the time had come. But she felt that the subject of Audrey's friendship would not be the real cause of the impending disruption. It was only an incident for opening the way.

"Jesse, I think we have argued about Audrey dozens of times in the past," she replied to him. "If the dissension which exists between us," she went on, "was only that which might be charged to the question of Audrey's friendship, I would, though unwillingly, sacrifice her for my own happiness. But it is not. Before my illness you behaved yourself far from what a husband should, in fact, and I speak advisedly, more like a cur than a man." Her husband winced. "I had hoped for our child's sake,

however, you would change your life; your treatment of me."

He endeavored to interrupt, but she would have none of it.

"But you have not. Since my recovery—though while I was ill you behaved splendidly—I have been compelled to note many little ways in which you have hurt me, hurt me deeply." Tears were shining in her eyes. "I have tried to make you happy and I felt that after all my suffering, you might behave as you once did. Now I feel it is useless—impossible, Jesse, our living happily together—we cannot agree."

He quickly answered her, as she dried her tears. "Dear, it has not all been my fault; you, too, have been unreasonable in your demands sometimes. You must realize that I have business worries that keep me troubled, and that I cannot devote all my thoughts to you and home."

"Yes," she answered, "that's just it; when a husband is charged with infidelity or lack of thought for his home and family, he replies invariably that his business occupies his time."

"But that *is* so, dear," he insisted. "You have naught to do but take care of your home. I must support you, and do it in the way to which you have been accustomed. To accomplish all this, I must work and work hard."

"Don't mislead yourself, dear," she argued defending her position. "A wife has tribulations also. You must not believe for a moment that the care

of a home is not trying and laborious. And with all, I always do my best to have a pleasant word and a smile for you when you reach home."

He knew it would be useless to argue with her. To go more deeply into it would mean only more unpleasant memories of wrongs in the past, and that his wife's knowledge of those indiscretions would count against him. So he decided to ask for time in which to show his repentance and live down that past, on condition that she would consent to separate from Audrey Chittenden.

"Now, listen, dear," he said as he rose and kissed her, doing likewise to Master Jesse, Jr. "Listen, dear. If you'll promise me that you will not see Audrey Chittenden, I'll promise you you will have no cause for further quarrel or unhappiness in the future."

Smiling, she replied: "All right, dear—it's agreed —you've made me happier to-night than you have for a long time."

They finished supper in joy, affectionately feasting their eyes and hearts on the bond between them: Jesse, Jr.

That evening Audrey Chittenden called, and left about 9:30 after talking of matters which mutually interested them.

Jesse Church left the house when she came, and only returned when he thought she had gone.

Madeline spent a pleasant hour or more with her friend. She did not confide to her the compact she had entered into with her husband, which

would mean their separation. There was a sad expression about her friend's eyes that told Audrey she was not happy.

* * * * * * * *

It would be both superfluous and tiring to record the differences as they arose between husband and wife. Suffice to say that they realized they were ill-mated, and mutually resolved to end it.

Jesse Church consulted with his attorney who advised patience and a little diplomacy.

Madeline confided in Audrey.

She told her friend all—everything—from the day they had returned from the country on their honeymoon, over a year before.

Audrey listened with sad thoughts.

"Don't give up, Madeline dear," she said; "everything will right itself, and you will be glad you were not hasty. Think well and deeply before you act," were the words with which she concluded.

She buoyed up the forlorn and drowning hope within Madeline's heart, and when they parted that night, the wife went home with re-kindled hopes of a possible reconciliation with her husband.

Weeks passed by, but the change for the better in the Church home did not come.

They had often thought that the baby might bring them again together. But the tie that binds every father and mother was not strong enough to unite these two drifting people.

So at last they decided they must part. And with that end in view, they paid a professional call on the

husband's legal advisor, Mr. Wilmot.

The attorney said:

"Arrange the details between you, then come to me, and I'll do all the law requires."

This they had done. The husband was to convey to the wife the title and absolute ownership in their handsome home, together with a monthly allowance of five hundred dollars for the support of herself and child, the baby to remain in the custody of the mother, "because of the child's tender years."

The legal document was quickly drawn, duly signed and executed, and they were free to live apart, *a mensa et thoro.*

Madeline brought her mother to live with her. The husband moved out.

* * * * * * * *

They were apparently satisfied and possibly happy. Neither complained so far as anyone knew. If their hearts ached them, if they regretted the unfortunate separation and there came moments when they longed for each other's love and society, no one knew.

They lived their lives from each other; the one little knew what the other was doing.

And such was the first impressionable step they took in their married life.

They had years before agreed to marry. So they had later married.

They agreed to separate. So they separated.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The day before her resignation was to take effect Audrey Chittenden attended early at the office.

Late in the afternoon she concluded her last duties for her employer. She sat musing and thoughtful.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by the buzzer on her resk. She entered Mr. Stockholm's office.

"You called, Mr. Stockholm?" she inquired.

"Miss Chittenden, I believe your resignation takes effect to-morrow, does it not?" he kindly said. "I want to have a talk with you, young lady," he added.

He opened the drawer of his desk and took out what appeared to be a check-book in which he wrote.

"Miss Chittenden, it gives me pleasure to hand you these two checks. One is from the firm; the other, from me, personally. I hope you will enjoy the use of them."

Audrey murmured her thanks.

He looked her in the eye, and continued:

"Who is this man who is taking you from me, eh?" he smiled.

"I think you are acquainted with the gentleman, Mr. Stockholm; in fact, I know you are. It is Bob Benton,"

"A fine fellow; a fine fellow, indeed, Miss Chittenden. I congratulate you. When are you going to get married; and am I to be invited?" he asked.

Audrey withdrew her eyes from the gaze of her employer. She did not know what his thoughts were on the supbject of a man and woman living together without the ceremony of marriage. She decided to tell Mr. Stockholm that she did not intend to marry.

"We're not going to be married," she began.

"Miss Chittenden. you don't mean to tell me—oh, I can't believe it of you," he gasped. "Girl, do you know what it will mean—have you any idea of the monstrocity of it all!",

"I have thought it all out Mr. Stockholm, and I care nothing for the conventionalties. I must live my life in the one way I believe will bring me that which I want most."

"But, Miss Chittenden, do you realize you are attacking an institution, a social condition that has

existed for centuries—for all time, almost since the world began?" he cried.

"It depends how you look at it, Mr. Stockholm. I am not living my life for the purpose of others living theirs the same; I do not advertise myself as a creator of new ideas; I simply am doing what I think is best for Bob and for me—*for Bob and for me,* understand?"

"But it's all the same, dear; there's no difference; you can't draw so fine a line as you try to; whether you intend or not to give to the world an illustration of how to live life the happiest, you cannot prevent them from accepting your views upon the marital relation," he insisted.

"Of course, of that I know, sir; but then am I to blame?

"No, I suppose not, yet I'm afraid you will have much to contend with in the future," he answered.

"By that future, I am ready and willing to abide; I shall never criticise the world if my future proves unhappy." She paused, and then she went on. "But I have no doubts—I know." Again she ceased. "You talk, Mr. Stockholm, of married life, and of its century old institution. You know the Churches, do you not?" she asked.

He bowed his head in the affirmative.

"But, Miss Chittenden, it is not all the same. Take me, for instance; am I not happy—have I not always been so?" His eyes brightened at the thought. "Of course," he went on, "there may have been moments when little disagreements arose, but

what are they in comparison of the many days of joy and bliss?"

She looked at him with a smile covering her features. "It may be true that you have been happy; but your life is not the life to set as an example of present day marriages." She spoke thoughtfully. "I presume you must be married now twenty years or more." He nodded his head in acquiescence. "Well, the world is different to-day than it was when you married—men and women are different. Pardon me, sir, when I say that you and Mrs. Stockholm are of the old school —not of to-day. As long as your first years of married life—say the first five—passed away with little or no dissension, that which came after I'll agree was not darkened by strife. But it is those first years wherein all the trouble arises. I have no fear in saying, sir, that had you your life to live over again, and you were to marry to-day, you would not be as happy."

"Mr. Stockholm, the world to-day holds above everything else, its independence. One does not and will not, if he can prevent it, become dependent upon another. And it is this independence which one loses on marriage. You will agree with me, I am sure, that married folks are dependent on each other. They are not as free as they formerly were. Their time they must account for, and their conduct, too. And this restraint to which they have never before been accustomed to, causes

a feeling of dissatisfaction—again arguments arise, and again the final result is the same."

"Well, Miss Chittenden, you evidently know much more of the world than I do; I've never studied social conditions much; business has occupied all my time. But there still remains a doubt in my mind as to the wisdom of your most radical convictions, for convictions they must be, for one to speak so strongly as you do. I only hope you never will regret your contemplated action. It is true, that in a way, the world has nothing to say of what you intend to do with your life, yet, you cannot all in all leave it out of the question, or permit yourself to ignore it. If our life is clean and honorable, as we see it and believe it, and our conscience does not smite us, you may be right. There is much in what you say for deep and serious thought —to those who are about to take a step into the married state." He stopped for a moment. "Can I say more than agree with you when I believe you will be happy—that I wish you every joy?" he concluded.

After Audrey had closed the door, Mr. Stockholm sat still and soliloquized.

"A strange woman—very strange; but a jewel, a jewel."

* * * * * * * *

It was close to six o'clock when Bob called for Audrey for the last time. His car was waiting to take her to her new home, a magnificent one on Riverside Drive.

Everything the heart could desire—and more—was there. A den had been constructed specially to remind them of their former days. Of the other numberless corners and places it would be useless to make mention.

Again Bob pleaded his oft-expressed wish. "Won't you let me bring you here as my wife—as the world and the law and religion would have it?"

A frown clouded her brow. "Now, dear, you're becoming nasty again," she said, pouting. "You'll spoil all the joy and happiness of it," she ended.

"Oh, dear, I don't want to be nasty, but I would rather, oh, how much—I would have you here. Won't you marry, me dear?" he urged.

Again he appreciated he could not persuade or turn her.

All along he had hoped that when this moment had arrived she would look at the matter as he did. What could he do? Everything that he could, he had; and yet, nothing he could or would do, would change her ideas of life. Again the thought came to him to threaten her with leaving, but then his heart told him he could not tolerate parting with her. So again he became reconciled to the situation.

Then he lifted her up and they both stood, he holding her in his arms. He looked down at her and into her eyes.

He murmured in her ear, the words coming forth with all the strength he could command:

"Well, dear, you're mine—mine, do you hear? If not by religious, by formal, by legal ceremony of marriage, then in heart, in soul, in body. You're mine. You're my wife."

She was smiling and her eyes burned with the feeling of love she knew he possessed for her and she for him.

He went on: "Whether the world will take you or not for Mrs. Robert A. Benton, it makes no difference to me. To me you are Mrs. Robert A. Benton —now and forever—living or dead. You're mine."

He showered her cheek with kisses; his eyes were burning and his breath was coming fast.

She clung to him in his feverish embrace, and murmured in return:

"Mine—mine——".

"Mine—mine!"

P. 179—Celibacy

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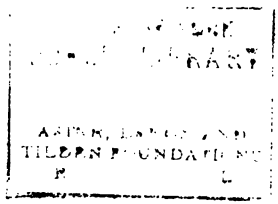

III
FIVE YEARS LATER

CHAPTER XIX.

Little Jesse Church, Jr., had been kidnapped!

As soon as the distressing fact was known to Mrs. Church, she at once communicated with Audrey Chittenden. It was about 2 o'clock of a beautiful spring day.

Calling Audrey on the 'phone, she cried:

"Audrey, the baby is gone; disappeared!"

Audrey didn't at first realize what she meant.

"What's that, Madeline—the boy is lost?" No ——," she excitedly inquired.

"Yes—yes—yes."

"I'll be right over, dear," she said.

She called her maid. "Irene, tell Mr. Benton on his return this evening, that I have gone over to Mrs. Church, and that he should call there as soon as he has finished supper."

Fifteen minutes later she arrived at Madeline's home. She found her in tears and greatly excited.

"Don't worry, dear," she said, "it'll be all right. The baby must have lost his way; he'll be brought home directly by someone." But she had little hope that the child would soon return.

"Now, Madeline, tell me, when did you first learn that the baby was gone?" Audrey inquired.

"About a little more than an hour ago; I sent Mary out to bring Jesse in, so I could wash and dress him. I intended to take him for a walk. The girl was out for some time, and I became anxious. I couldn't make out what should keep her so long. I was about to follow her, when as I opened the front door, I saw her come up the stoop. One glance, and I knew something had happened. She was crying. I tried to get her to tell me what the trouble was, but I couldn't understand a word she said. Finally, after much coaxing she told me a disconnected story of her looking for the child and asking his litle fellow playmates where he was, and when she couldn't find him, she went hunting for him in the neighborhood, everywhere, but it was of no avail. As soon as I could pull myself together, I ran down the street and questioned other children. As I stood talking to them, Mrs. Darlington's little fellow came along. I spoke to him and he told me that an automobile stopped at the curb where he was playing with Jesse, a lady dismounted and came over. She spoke to Jesse and gave him some candy. Finally

she asked if he wouldn't take a ride in the choo-choo car. Of course, the little fellow clapped his hands with delight, and the lady carried him to the car and drove rapidly off."

"Did you ask the boy what the lady looked like? You know, dear, she may be one of your friends."

"Yes; he told me he couldn't tell much because she had something on her face, a veil I suppose he meant. I asked him how she was dressed, and he replied that she had on a black dress."

"Did you ask if anyone else was in the car?"

"Yes; he told me there was a gentleman seated in the rear seat."

"One beside the driver?" quiried Audrey interrupting.

"Yes; he said two men; one at the wheel, and the other in the back. I asked him what kind of a looking man the one seated in the rear was, but the little fellow replied that he could not tell; that the man had on a big cap and a coat with its collar turned up, both covering his face so he could not see."

"Now, dear, don't go on so. It'll be all right, dear."

Madeline had again commenced to cry, and Audrey tried to pacify her.

"Is there anything else, Madeline?"

"N-o; nothing."

"Then be quiet, dear. We can't do much now; it would be useless for us to communicate with the police right away. I'll 'phone Bob and have him come here at once."

Bob, down-town, dismissed everything for the day and arrived at the house half an hour later.

Quickly he was told the news. He realized what it meant, but hoped it was simply a case of a child being returned later, having been taken for a ride by a friend, but in his heart he knew that the story as told by the Darlington boy showed too plainly that the affair had been prearranged by the kidnappers. Nevertheless, he endeavored to calm Madeline.

"Don't worry, Madeline; the little fellow will return—it's nothing—only some wealthy lady or friend taking him for a ride." And then he went on: "We'll wait until five o'clock, and if he has not arrived by that time, then I'll ring up Police Headquarters." But he didn't intend to do anything of the kind. He wanted to speak with Audrey a moment, if he could find a way of getting Madeline out of the room.

To carry out the ruse, he bade Madeline goodbye and reaching the door, whispered to Audrey: "I'm going in the car to Headquarters at once; I'll see Jamison if he can be found; I don't like the look of things, dear."

Half an hour later the machine, puffing and snorting, stopped in front of Police Headquarters.

He went up the steps two at a time and made a rush for the Detective Bureau. Someone tried to stop him, but he passed unceremoniously without waiting long enough to even glance at his obstructor.

Arriving at the door, on the glass panel of which were the words, "Detective Bureau," he pushed it open and entered. He was stopped at the iron railing.

"Whom would you like to see, sir?" he heard someone inquire.

"I want to see Detective Jamison at once." The tone of command in his voice caused the attendant to look up at him with open eyes. "Kindly tell him Mr. Benton wishes to see him on very important business."

A moment later a florid, sinewy, hadsome, tall young fellow came out. He must have been a man between the age of thirty-five and forty. Broad-shouldered, standing straight as a column, he im-| one as a man of commercial interests more than as a detective.

For the past two years William R. Jamison had been the star of the local detective division. He had earned an enviable reputation by his shrewdness and courage. He had solved some of the most mysterious crimes in New York; crimes which might have remained so forever, and been docketed along with the other "unsolved crimes" of the New York Police Department.

This was the kind of man to whom Bob Benton went for assistance. They had known each other for many years—had graduated from college together—and he knew that he had called on the one man who would be able to solve the mystery of Jesse Church, Jr.'s disappearance.

He brightened up with pleasure when he saw "Bill Jamison" come out to great him.

He went to meet him. "Hello, old fellow; glad to see you; I——"

"Well, if it ain't friend Bob! How the devil are you, anyway, old boy?" was the greeting Bob received. "Come right in; come right in." They shook hands as they moved toward Jamison's private office.

"Well, Bob, what can I do for you?"

"Bill, I've got a job for you, and I think a big one, too," he was told. "You remember Jesse Church, don't you, Bill? Well, as you may know, he has a little son about six years old, who lives with his mother on the Drive. He's disappeared—been kidnapped!"

"W-h-a-t!" Jamison exclaimed.

"Yes; about two this afternoon, he was out in the street around the corner from his home playing with the children next door——"

He told Jamison all that he had learned from Audrey; under the minute cross questioning of his friend, there was little left unexplained.

"Now you tell Mrs. Church not to worry," Jamison said, "and don't you get excited either. In the parlance of the Department it is a 'cinch'. I'll lay hands on the kidnappers inside of forty-eight hours."

"Can't you tell me something, Bill?" Bob inquired somewhat pleadingly.

The detective smiled. "No, I may be wrong, and I don't want to build false hopes in you," he replied.

"But——"

"There are no 'buts' to it. Be satisfied with what I've told you. Just say I'll have the little fellow in forty-eight hours—that's all."

"I'll go back with you, Bob."

Twenty-five minutes later they stepped out of the car at Madeline's home on the Drive.

"Madeline," said Bob on their entering, "this gentleman is a friend of mine—Mr. Jamison—Mrs. Church."

"I asked Mr. Jamison to call with me. I told him of the mysterious disappearance of Jesse, and he expressed his interest, so much so that he asked that I bring him to you. He wishes to learn any other facts which you may have failed to tell me," he said.

Madeline went on to tell the detective the story as already recited. When she had finished, Jamison asker her:

"Did you inquire whether the machine was a private car or a taxicab?"

Madeline was non-plussed. She tearfully replied: "No, I did not."

"Or what the number of the car was?" he continued.

"No; I didn't think of it. I was so excited," she told him.

"Well then, suppose we talk with the little boy; can you send for him, Mrs. Church?" the detective suggested.

Fifteen minutes later Bob returned holding the Darlington boy by the hand.

"Now my little man," Jamison said, "can you

tell me what kind of a car it was that little Jesse rode away in?"

The child answered quickly. "It was a choo-choo car, sir."

And notwithstanding the seriousness of the occasion, they all smiled.

"I know it was a choo-choo car, but was it a big one, and what color was it? Or was it one of those small red ones?"

"It was a big one, and it was black, sir. It was like a carriage, only it didn't have horses."

"Now that's all right, my boy; and do you remember the number it had painted on the back?" continued Jamison in questioning.

He had little hope that the boy would know the number or hoped that he even had looked for it, but he did not intend that anything should be left undone. And he was right.

The child stared at him, not knowing what he meant. "No, sir," replied he, bewildered.

As the Inspector had learned all he could, Mary took the boy home.

Jamison said: "Don't worry, Mrs. Church; your little boy is in good hands; he'll be well taken care of; and I promise you I will bring him to you or give you news of his kidnappers and where he is within forty-eight hours."

Madeline could scarcely speak her gratitude.

Inspector Jamison carried the boy's photograph when he left.

In the half hour that it required for Detective

Jamison to reach Headquarters on his return, he had much time in which to cogitate on the mysterious disappearance of the Church boy.

He felt sure that he knew the identity of those guilty of the kidnapping, for in his own mind it had been a carefully planned affair.

As he rode along he took from his pocket a slip of paper, and wrote something on it.

"I'll place this in an envelope and date and seal it. Put it in the safe at the office and give it to Benton when the case is closed. I'll bet I'll prove to be correct," he soliloquized.

Reaching his private office, he found Detective Finossi, whom he had asked for, awaiting him.

"No, I won't take it now, Finossi." The other was about to make a report.

Jamison reached for the 'phone and called a number.

"Is Mr. Church in?" he inquired.

"No, sir."

"Was he in to-day?"

"He was this morning; but he left about 11 o'clock to go out of town on business, until to-morrow."

"Very well; thank you; that's all——"

He was puzzled. Could it be possible that he was wrong in his theory? The kidnapping had taken place about 2 P. M. and Mr. Church had left his office for out of town, about 11 o'clock in the morning.

Then he wrote a telegram in cipher.

"Have this sent off immediately, and when a reply comes, hold it for me," were his instructions.

Translated, the message read:

"Send description automobile owner Jesse Church, 572 Central Park West, obtain Secretary of State."

It was addressed to the "Chief of Police, Albany, New York," and signed "William R. Jamison, Inspector, New York Police."

"Now, Finossi," he said, "we're on the Church kidnapping case until concluded—understand?"

"I'm on."

"Very well then; there is a possibility that the child was stolen by one of the Black Hand gang for ransom, but I doubt it. What I want you to do, is, to clean up Mulberry Street and The Ben to-night. Find out if possible whether they have a hand in the mystery. Don't close in until you have some positive information; see me the first thing in the morning here—that's all."

Finossi saluted, and passed out.

Detective Finossi who had been assigned to the Church Kidnapping case, as it was to be known at Headquarters, was the right hand man of Jamison.

Italian criminal cases were his specialty. He was himself an Italian by birth, and spoke the language fluently.

When Finossi was sent to the Italian quarters, he knew well what was required of him.

CHAPTER XX.

That Jesse Church, Jr., had "disappeared" there was no question. The gray of the next dawn peeped through from the dark sky of the night before and no sign was had of him.

Madeline was in a frenzy, and could not be quieted. She became hysterical.

Whether the child had simply wandered off or whether some one had stolen him was the subject of an excited discussion by a general public, thirsting for the mysterious, the morbid and the curious. Owing to the prominence of those concerned, the newspapers issued extras, with big staring headlines.

The case presented an opportunity to the more sensational yellow journals to revive the story of the separation of the parents, five years before.

Reporters beseiged the home of the mother, but none were allowed to see her.

Likewise the members of the press assaulted the home of the father on Central Park West.

It was therefore that the morning editions of the papers told but little of the facts of the story.

Inspector Jamison arrived at Headquarters next morning in a fury.

"Who the devil gave the story of the Church Kidnapping case to the press?" he said to the man at the desk. "Any reply to my telegram?" he concluded.

"Yes, sir; it's lying on your desk."

"Has Detective Finossi been in yet this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Well, as soon as he gets in have him see me at once," he ordered.

Jamison entered his private office. He read the wire in cipher, and ejaculated "Ah."

A knock on the door sounded—it was Detective Finossi.

"Nothing doing, Chief," he said. "I canvassed the colony last night and until early this morning, but found no reason to believe that anything like a kidnapping had been pulled in which any Italians were concerned."

Jamison smiled. "Very good; I thought as much, but I wanted to be sure. Finossi, you're to come with me down on Broad Street this morning. I'm going to interview a certain gentleman in that district. You're to go in with me, but will wait in the outer office. When I've finished I'll come out. If

I return alone, you're to wait until he comes out and trail him. If he should come out with me, you're not to recognize me. 'Phone me here at Headquarters as soon as you have anything to report."

A few minutes later Jamison and Finossi were riding heavenward in the Broad Exchange Building. At the 23rd floor they got off and entered the offices of Jesse Church. They were approached by the office boy.

"Is Mr. Church in?"

"Yes, sir; let me have your card, please."

The boy returned a moment later.

"Mr. Church will see you, sir. Kindly step this way," he said.

"Mr. Church, I believe?" Jamison asked on entering.

"That's my name, sir. I believe you are Inspector Jamison of Headquarters?"

"You're correct, sir."

"Well, what can I do for you, Inspector?"

The Inspector hesitated. "I come on rather a disagreeable errand, Mr. Church." The latter's face paled at his words. "Do you know that your son was kidnapped yesterday afternoon and——"

His listener had sprang from his seat.

"W-h-a-t!" cried Jesse Church.

"Yes; didn't you see the morning papers?"

"No; I've been out of town since early yesterday morning. I arrived back in the city an hour ago. Tell me, Inspector, is there any news," he cried.

Jamison looked at him. Either he was an excellent actor, or he was not guilty of the kidnapping.

"News; yes; I think I've got the man who did the trick."

Jesse Church outwardly appeared to be glad to hear the statement. "I hope you have, Inspector, I Hope you have. Tell me, Inspector, what can I do; what am I to do; tell me."

"Nothing just now. All I can say to you, Mr. Church, is, that you should offer no reward; and if any mail comes to you demanding ransom to ignore the request. Then forward the message to me immediately at Headquarters," he suggested.

"But, Inspector, I can't sit here idle while my boy is gone," the father cried excitedly.

The Inspector looked at him. "Well, that's all I can tell you, sir. I'm going to return immediately to Headquarters; I'm expecting a report from one of my men. Good morning, sir."

With those last words Jamison left the office.

Five minutes after he had passed out, Jesse Church emerged from the inside. He was in a hurry. Calling to the boy at the desk that he would return in half an hour, he brushed passed Finossi, and out to the hall.

A second later the detective was at his heels. They entered the same elevator car and disappeared. Jesse Church failed to recognize, in his excitement, the gentleman who had been waiting in his office.

* * * * * * * *

Inspector Jamison returned immediately to his

office. Reaching there, he called Benton's office.

"This is Bill Jamison," he said.

"Hello Bill; any news?" Bob answered.

"A little, Bob; but I want to see you at my office right away."

Ten minutes later Bob Benton entered the Inspector's office.

"Bob, I think I've got my man—no, not a word." Bob attempted to speak. Then the detective opened the drawer of his desk and took from it the envelope he had sealed the day before on his return from Madeline's home. "Bob," he went on, "you see this envelope? Well, the name of the party who stole little Jesse Church is written on the inside. No you can't have it now. I want you to write your name across the back of it where it's sealed, and the day I bring home the lad or learn the identity of his captor, we'll open it up. I'll bet you you'll find the name the same."

The Inspector smiled. It was a little way he had of giving himself a little glory.

Bob looked at him astonished, as he did the day before. But he knew it would be useless to ask his friend anything. So he replied:

"It's a go, Bill; and if you're right it means another dinner beside the one I promised you yesterday."

After Bob's departure, Jamison pressed the button on his desk. The clerk entered.

"Is Miss Williams in?" he inquired of him.

"I believe she is, sir."

"Have her come here at once."

Two minutes later a young woman of twenty-five knocked at the Inspector's door.

"Miss Williams, I want you to ring up an office downtown, and ask for a certain gentleman. When you get the connection speak to none else. If you are reasonably sure you've got the right man, tell him that you don't want to mention names. Then go on and inform him that there are some men up here raising a terrific disturbance, and that they claim they are detectives. Tell him that you want him to come at once. Now remember, say the words, 'up here,' and, 'detectives.' When you receive his answer ring off before he can question you. Don't call before 2 o'clock. If he isn't in then, keep calling at half hour intervals until you get him," added the Inspector. Then he concluded, "As soon as you have spoken to him, report to me here."

A word or two more and that was all.

Miss Williams retired.

The telephone bell on the Inspector's desk rang.

"Is this the Chief?" someone inquired.

"Yes, who are you?" He recognized the voice, but wanted to make sure.

He received an answer which would be no information to a stranger. But to him it told that Detective Finossi was speaking.

"Our man left immediately after you had gone. I trailed him out of the building to Nassau Street. I kept him in sight and he entered No. 10. I followed, and saw him enter the offices of Jonathan

P. Wilmot, a lawyer. I then left to communicate with you. Any other orders, Chief?"

"Fine; keep after him, and let me know the next move. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," and he rung off.

That day, shortly after 2 in the afternoon, Miss Williams entered. She said: "The man you directed me to speak to was greatly excited when I told him. He replied he would come immediately."

* * * * * * * *

The clock in the main office was marking off five o'clock, when the Inspector's 'phone rang again.

"Hello, hello," he cried.

"Is that you, Chief?" he heard.

"Yes," he answered.

"I'm up at Larchmont; I followed our man here. He entered a house next door from where I am 'phoning. He can't get away; I've got my eye on it. He's still there."

"I expected as much, Finossi," Jamison answered. "You stay there until he comes out and trail him. I'm coming up on the first train I can catch."

"By the way, he first returned to the lawyer's office before coming here——"

"Then he surely won't leave. You meet me at the station within an hour or so. I'm leaving right away; good-bye."

"I'm off for Larchmont on the Church Kidnapning case," he told the clerk.

* * * * * * * *

It was nine o'clock that night that Inspector

Jamison arrived at the home of Madeline Church. He was covered with dust.

"I'm tickled to see you, Bill," was the greeting the Inspector received from Bob.

"You need not worry, Mrs. Church," Jamison said. "Your boy is well; I've seen him; he's with his father in Larchmont. The man who kidnapped your boy was your husband. There was no problem. As soon as I learned from Bob that you had been separated from your husband, I immediately figured that it was simply a domestic affair. In fact, if he had noted my questions, he would have surmised as much himself," began the Inspector.

And then he went on to recite his movements. The telegram to the Chief of Police of Albany, and the reply giving the description of the automobile similar to that told by the Darlington boy; then his interview with Mr. Church, and the trailing of that gentleman by his assistant; then the telephoning of another operator for the purpose of having Mr. Church take him to the boy; and finally, the situation as he found it that evening on his arrival at Larchmont.

"When I arrived at Larchmont my lieutenant met me at the station as directed. We at once repaired to the house Mr. Church had been seen to enter. When we reached here, Mr. Church himself came to the door in answer to my ring. He recognized me at once, and bade us come in. We walked in. Then he introduced us to an elderly gentleman who was sitting in the library—the room he had

taken us to—as his attorney, a Mr. Jonothan P. Wilmot—I have his card."

"From that moment on he said nothing. The attorney spoke for him."

"He informed me that Mr. Church was the father of the boy and that they had been separated for the past five years; that the father could not suffer the pain of having his child away from him any longer, and that it was under his advice that Mr. Church had regained the possession of the boy in the way he did. He further went on to say that Mr. Church intended keeping the boy, and that if you wished to reclaim him you would have to resort to the Courts."

"To show me that the child was in good health, he had him brought in. True, the little fellow, it could readily be appreciated, had been crying, but otherwise he was well."

"Of course, in the circumstances, I could neither take the boy away nor make an arrest."

Madeline sobbed softly. Audrey tried to soothe her.

There was silence; all was over.

Bob saw Jamison to the door.

"I'll see you in the morning, Bill, if you're not busy," he suggested.

"All right, Bob—say about 10," replied Jamison.

They shook hands, and the Inspector went away.

CHAPTER XXI.

During the five years that had elapsed since the separation of husband and wife, Madeline lived happily.

Her child occupied all her time, and she was always careful of his welfare. The little fellow gave her much joy. In the evening she would spend an hour or two after supper, playing with and fondling the child, and at bedtimes she would sit for minutes lulling him to sleep.

Of her husband she seldom thought. The moments that were not occupied by attending to her son, were taken up with the Mission work she had been compelled to drop five years before. Of the other leisure moments, there was always something to do—sewing, knitting and other work for the baby. There was always somewhere to go, if she had nothing else to do. She would pay a visit to

Audrey Chittenden with whom she had resumed a friendship of earlier days—a friendship that had been severed by the demands of her husband years before.

She was happy during these years, extremely happy.

There was only one misfortune which came to mar her otherwise blissful life. Her mother had passed away two years after her separation from her husband. For weeks after she was indisposed. The loss she had sustained told on her greatly.

Only time could heal her sufferings—and it did. Gradually she recovered from the shock, and she found she was alone, except for her child. She decided to sell her home and take to smaller quarters. Locating a smaller house, she purchased it with a portion of the proceeds she realized from the sale of the former, and moved in. She didn't have to worry for an income, for the inheritance she received from her mother and the monthly allowance her husband paid her, were sufficient with which to live.

During all this time Audrey Chittenden had been near. After the death of Madeline's mother, she had asked her to come and live with her. But Madeline refused, saying she didn't want to burden others with herself and child.

And all these years she saw but little of the father of her child. Occasionally, she would meet him at some social function, one or two of which she continued to patronize and attend. But these

meetings were all. She never spoke to him, and he seemed always careful to remain distant.

The husband managed to tear from his memory, so far as he was able, the recollection that he had ever married. His business and the Club consumed his waking moments. Only when he would see his wife would the thought of the past come to him.

The check to meet his wife's monthly allowance he regularly forwarded.

Only one heartache he fostered. It was the thought of his boy, and as the years passed on, he worried for the welfare of the child. His father's love cried out for him, and he wanted to see him and crush him to his heart. He always kept advised as to the child's health and living, and rejoiced to learn that the little fellow was well.

It was the possession of his son that caused him his greatest pain and suffering. But he rallied under the knowledge that the boy had the best of care and attention.

But as has already been shown, this love he possessed for his boy overpowered him, and for his own sake he was forced to resort to the kidnapping of the child to secure possession of him. And he did it.

And all this time what of Audrey and Bob? How were they living; and were they happy?

As she had promised, she went to him on the day which brought in a New Year subsequent to the closing of the second part of this volume.

And he took her to his home.

She became the mistress of his home. They lived within its walls a charmed existence. Audrey continued to attend to her Mission work and she found little time for idleness.

Bob prospered. His business gradually expanded more and more every year; his wealth now had almost doubled.

The same night that Inspector Jamison made his report as to the disappearance of Jesse Church, Jr., Audrey and Bob reached home about midnight. They had remained after the Inspector had gone to console Madeline in her trouble. When they reached home, they naturally continued the subject.

"Dear," she said, "I was thinking that if Madeline cannot afford to pay the best counsel what he wants, whether we aught not to assist her."

He smiled. "Why, certainly, Audrey, I will see my attorney the first thing in the morning, and consult him. He is considered the foremost criminal and divorce lawyer at the Bar in this city. If he accepts the case, Madeline need not worry about his fee." He ceased. "Are you happy now?" he concluded.

"Oh, so happy; you're a darling, Bob," she cried in ecstasy .

* * * * * * * *

The following morning, Bob kept his appointment with Inspector Jamison. The latter had just reached his office when Bob arrived at Headquarters.

The Inspector went to his safe and drew forth the envelope he had placed there in Bob's presence the day before.

"Open it," he said.

Bob perused the inscription therein, and read:

"'Jesse Church, the boy's father.'"

"Well, I'll be——," he ejaculated. "You're a wonder, Bill," he exclaimed, offering his hand to his friend.

From there Bob went direct to the offices of his attorney, Judson R. Jontine, Esq., on Nassau Street.

The attorney listened attentively to him.

An arrangement was made for Madeline to call on Mr. Jontine that afternoon at two.

Mr. Jontine was busy when Madeline arrived, but learning the identity of his callers, he quickly saw them.

"Have you the separation agreement with you?" he inquired of Madeline, after preliminary introductions.

Madeline had thoughtfully brought it. During his reading of the document, the attorney's brow gathered. There must have been included in the writing something he did not like. As he laid the paper on his desk, he said:

"Yes, this a proper separation agreement, but there is one provision or phrase contained in it which I would have preferred to have seen omitted. I refer to the words—after the provision providing for the custody of the child—the words, 'because of his tender age.'"

"Of course, Mr. Jontine," Audrey said, "I am not an attorney, but from my experience in the past, may I ask whether those words are conclusive?"

He smiled. "Why, Miss Chittenden, you are quite a lawyer; pity you didn't study the profession." And then he went on more seriously: "N-o, I don't believe they are fatal. But we lawyers would say, the words are ugly ones."

"Mr. Jontine, am I to understand that you will undertake the case?" Madeline inquired.

"Yes, Mrs. Church, I will, and need I say that you may rest assured I will do my best?"

"I have no doubts on that score."

"But, Mrs. Church, I cannot simply make an application for the custody of the child in you. I must commence what in the profession is termed an "Action for a Separation or Limited Divorce," and accompany it with a motion for the custody of the boy."

"I think I understand, Mr. Jontine," she said to him.

"And that reminds me; do you desire that I apply for alimony and counsel fee at the same time?"

"I don't know; if the suit is brought will my husband cease paying me under this agreement?"

"Of course, of that I cannot say; but it would be well to be on the safe side—to couple in the action a motion for alimony and counsel fee."

"Very well, sir; do as you think best; I'll leave the matter entirely in your hands."

"Well, then, that is settled," replied the attorney.

"Call here to-morrow at 4 o'clock, and the papers will be ready." Then he paused. "You say you have no witnesses as to your husband's cruelty or his conduct?" he inquiringly concluded.

Madeline reddened. "Only as to what some person told me as to his movements the night I referred to months ago," she bashfully answered.

"I don't mean that particular night, if I understand you do not wish an absolute divorce. Am I right?" he inquired. Then he went on: "That's merely heresay evidence and I don't care much for it."

"No, I do not wish to obtain an absolute divorce, nor do I intend to bring up that behavior for a curious and hypocritical public to feast on."

"Well, then I refer to his conduct toward you personally—at home—all these incidents that you have told me about."

"No—of course, no one was present."

"Very well; we'll proceed on your papers alone."

As soon as they had gone, he called Bob Benton on the 'phone.

"Well, Bob, I haven't much hope of success; that is, so far as obtaining the custody of the child."

* * * * * * * *

The following day at 4 o'clock, Madeline Church called at Mr. Jontine's office and signed and verified the complaint and affidavit in her action for a limited divorce from her husband.

The next day, the managing clerk in the attorney's office succeeded in effecting service of the

summons and complaint, and motion papers, on Mr. Church.

To the complaint, the defendant had twenty days according to the Statutes of the State in which to answer the allegations of the wife, contained therein; but the return of the motion was made within five days from the day of service.

The argument thereon was to be heard before the Hon. Delancy T. Dixwell, Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York at Special Term for Motions, at Part I thereof, located in the old Tweed County Court House, New York City, Borough of Manhattan.

As soon as the process was served, some member of the press secured the information that such an action was pending, and that the sequel of the mysterious disappearance of Jesse Church, Jr., would be thrashed out in the Supreme Court.

The reporters immediately became interested. Two of the shining stars at the New York Bar were to be pitted against each other. They prepared to witness a battle royal. Pencils were sharpened, preparatory to reporting the anticipated proceedings. The staff photographers and sketch-artists also made ready their paraphernalia.

CHAPTER XXII.

The scene in the court room was a busy one.

It was nearing ten o'clock in the forenoon, and as Court convened at that hour, everybody was occupied with his particular duty. Lawyers and their clerks ran hither and thither; the court attendants continually bellowed out the name of one attorney or other who was likely being sought by his opponent or client. The benches were crowded and there was not one which remained unoccupied. Even standing room was a difficult place to obtain where one might remain unmolested or undisturbed.

At the long table, facing the elevated platform behind the railing whereon His Honor sat back of his desk, numerous reporters representing the great New York dailies, sat and conversed.

Further in the rear of the court room were seated men and women impatiently awaiting the appearance of the Judge. They were restless for the wheel of justice to commence to grind. Some were personally concerned in the litigation to be fought out during that session of the Court; others only curious spectators. Of the last named class, the majority were composed of women.

Madeline Church could be seen nestling between Audrey Chittenden on her right and Bob Benton on the left. She was pale, and seemed ill. Audrey was whispering to her, apparently endeavoring to cheer her, while Bob occasionally would interrupt with a word or two.

Suddenly above the noise and bustle of the court room was heard a gruff voice crying:

"Gentlemen, His Honor, the Court."

Then a man of forty, dark haired and heavy shouldered, wearing a black silk gown, appeared on the bench.

The names of the different litigants were called.

"Milweed against Buckingham," the voice cried.

Two gentlemen appeared in answer to the call.

One addressed the Court, and when he had concluded, the other. The words were spoken too low to be heard in the rear. And then the Clerk of the Court bellowed:

"The case of Milweed against Buckingham is adjourned to April 28th."

The two men referred to, turned, and passed out.

So the Clerk continued. Occasionally, two voices

would answer "Ready," and he would pass on to the next. Then another, and the answer "Adjourned to 26th by consent." And so on.

Mr. Jesse Church entered the court room, and stopped, bewildered. The crowd surged about and around him, and he could not move. He remained where he was.

Suddenly the Clerk's voice again was heard, just after Mr. Church had entered.

"Church against Church."

Everyone craned their necks. The reporters moved in their seats to a comfortable position.

Immediately two counsel approached the table before the Judge.

Mr. Jontine addressed the Court.

"If it may please your Honor," he said, "I have just consulted with my opponent, and he informs me that he has set up new matter in his opposing affidavits on this motion."

"While we could go on now and obtain an extension later in which to submit supplemental affidavits, I have suggested to Mr. Wilmot that we adjourn this motion at present for that purpose. He has kindly agreed and with his consent I respectfully ask the Court for an adjournment of two days so I may meet the new material for the purpose of doing full justice to my client."

Mr. Wilmot bowed.

"If it is agreeable to you, Mr. Wilmot, I will grant the request of counsel," his Honor said.

"I willingly consent, your Honor," Mr. Wilmot rejoined.

The case of Church against Church was adjourned for two days.

The principals were disappointed that the matter had been put over.

Jesse Church was one of the first to reach the corridor. In the crush, husband and wife failed to recognize each other.

* * * * * * * *

It was two days later.

The same court room, the same Judge and the same crowds.

The case of Church against Church had been advanced on the calendar to be reached at once.

Both sides answered "Ready."

Of the emotions that moved Audrey and Bob, it is hard to say. From their point of view, it is likely that they sympathized with both the husband and wife. But because of Audrey's life-long friendship with Madeline, their hearts, their hopes, their prayers went forth to her. They knew that the pain to the husband and father must be almost as great as to the wife and mother.

They were now playing a part in real life in the affairs of their friends—the marital troubles of those friends, and they awaited anxiously the result of the controversy.

The calendar had been called. The Court was ready to hear argument on the Church case.

The Clerk, for the second time, called the case of Church against Church.

Again everyone straightened up and craned their

necks, with eyes and ears wide open. They did not intend to allow a word to escape them. The reporters and the busy-bodies; the idlers and the curious; determined that nothing should occur that they did not see or hear.

The gentlemen of the day before advanced. Mr Wilmot sat down. Mr. Jontine remained standing.

The latter commenced speaking; the reporters became at once busy with their pencils.

The battle was on!

"If it may please the Court," Mr. Jontine opened. "This is a motion for alimony and counsel fee *pendente lite,* together with a second motion for the custody of the issue of the marriage, to the plaintiff. Of course, this is an action for a limited divorce." He paused.

It would be both superfluous and tiring to repeat the words of counsel for the next fifteen minutes.

Mr. Jontine elaborately related to the Court the days of the youth of the plaintiff and defendant; their anti-nuptial period; the term of their married life with all its misunderstandings, disagreements and refined cruelties of the husband. These have been told in previous chapters.

Mr. Jontine continued: "And if your Honor pleases those are the facts making up the history of the relations between this husband and wife."

"And now I come to more recent events in the lives of these two unhappy and mismated persons.

"As I have just related they entered into a separation agreement some five years ago, whereby and

wherein, the husband agreed to pay the wife the stated monthly income. I have no comment to make in that regard—the agreement was lived up to regularly and punctually. Then there was another provision in that document, namely, that the custody of this son, Jesse Church, Jr, should be granted to the wife," and he read from a paper, "'Because of his tender years'". He stopped for the fraction of a minute. He went on: "'Because of his tender years,' your Honor. I hope the Court will not dwell too seriously on those words. I do not desire to charge my worthy friend here," pointing to Mr. Wilmot, "with any attempt to mislead or defraud the wife, but he knowing that she had reposed her confidence in him, and the fact that she was an innocent young girl at the time of the execution of this agreement, I feel that he should have advised her as to the incorporation of these words. Not that I feel that this plaintiff has waived any of her rights by them, or that it makes our application more difficult, but if they were not present I would not need to dispose of them."

He paused, and wiped his forehead.

"But let me get down to even more recent events," he continued, "and the direct cause of this litigation and application. Within the last two weeks the defendant has perpetrated one of the foulest, one of the meanest, one of the most unmanly and unhusbandly, and one of the most despicable crimes a man could commit. If not a crime within the strict meaning of the law, it certainly was a crime inflicted on his wife and the mother."

His voice was growing stronger, and a pitch higher.

"This father, this defendant, if your Honor pleases, kidnapped his son—this mother's child." He waited for his words to impress the Court.

"Of this fact your Honor may be cognizant, as the daily press reported the story." He took a deep breath. "Did he inform his wife that he had done so; did he attempt to relieve the suffering moments of a mother's heart, when she realized her child had been stolen? No, no! She was permitted to grieve, to tear her heart, with the knowledge that her baby was gone from her bosom and the fear that the child was in strange hands and might be suffering any torture, any pain. Where, she did not and could not know." Again a pause.

"And when, and how, and through whom did she finally learn of the whereabouts of her child? Through the kindness of heart and assistance of a life-long friend; the young woman who had always been at her side, from childhood until this day, except during the time that this defendant prevented his wife from seeing her." Again a pause, and the drying of the face.

"And now, if your Honor pleases, I come to the new matter set up in the opposing affidavits to be submitted by my learned adversary. This woman he charges with being an immoral woman, a bad woman; this woman he practically charges as the cause of all his marital woes."

Mr. Jontine's voice was rising; the inflection was

noticeable, he called into play every artifice of eloquence he possessed. He went on.

"And, if your Honor pleases, who is this lady of whom this defendant speaks so ill! In my opinion she is the grandest, the most kindly, the most charitable, the most friendly woman it has ever been my pleasue to meet. Her heart is as true as steel, her friendship a thing more precious than gold."

He lowered his voice. "For her friend's sake, she signified her willingness to be brought into this affair when I read to her the opposing affidavit; I told her it would mean much unpleasant notoriety for her, but she replied that it was little she could do for her childhood chum."

"But let me go on. As I have just asked who is this woman? Your Honor does not know. Then let me say. This lady whom this defendant would impress this Court as being a bad woman," his voice was playing high again, "this lady whom he charges with crime as he does; this lady whom he would have as the cause of his domestic troubles, was the young girl friend of his wife's girlhood days; they were brought up and lived together; when this plaintiff became the mother of his child, who was the friend she went for and who came to her bedside and remained with her for days until her recovery was assured? She was this lady. Who was the person who saved this defendant from bankruptcy and ruin? This lady. She was willing to sacrifice her employer to save her friend, for she

knew that if this defendant became a pauper, his wife, her friend, would naturally be compelled to suffer. She knew that he was on the brink of financial disaster, and it was through her information, telephoned to his office by the man she loved, that this defendant was able to rehabilitate himself financially. Does he realize his present fortune he owes to her—this woman?"

Mr. Jontine paused for a moment.

There was a slight disturbance in the rear of the courtroom; a man was endeavoring to force himself to the front. The noise attracted everyone's attention. The proceedings were brought to an abrupt halt. The court officers tried to prevent the man fighting his way to the front, but he whispered something, and they cleared a way for him. He quickly reached Mr. Wilmot's side. The man was Jesse Church.

He hoarsely whispered in his counsel's ear.

"For God's sake, Mr. Wilmot, stop it, stop it! If you can withdraw my affidavit and only insist upon the custody of the boy, close the proceedings."

Mr. Wilmot quickly arose.

"If Mr. Jontine would allow this interruption." he bowed to that gentleman, and the latter consented with a shake of the head, "and if your Honor will permit," the former went on, "in behalf of my client, I wish to withdraw the affidavit I was about to submit, and leave only the matter of the custody of the child as an issue. We do not oppose the counsel fee or alimony asked."

He ceased. Jesse Church was by his side, his

ce white. "Say I did not know the identity of the person sending the information which I received, and the truth of which has just been told," he whispered fiercely. "I tried to learn five years ago," he ended.

Mr. Wilmot, addressing the Court: "My client wishes me to inform the Court that he has been entirely ignorant of the identity of his benefactress and that during the last five years, and particularly at the time, he did his best to learn."

There was a hush. The sensation that had been sprung, figuratively speaking, carried everyone off their feet. The climax was so unexpected. The reporters were working hard.

In the rear of the courtroom, the principals in this domestic drama sat as if stunned. They were pale and shaking. Notwithstanding, that they knew what to expect, the scene naturally affected them greatly, for they had not looked for Jesse's move. They had little anticipated that he would do as he had; the action taken by Jesse—his sudden order to his counsel.

"Gentlemen," said the Court, "then I understand that this has resolved itself simply into the question as to whether father or mother shall have the custody of the child?"

"I believe so," answered Mr. Jontine.

"I believe that is the issue," Mr. Wilmot added.

"Very well, gentlemen, I'll take any papers to be submitted, and reserve decision."

The clerk was calling the next case. The

spectators and reporters were leaving the court room, and it was being cleared quickly.

Outside in the corridor the warring factions met and the attorneys conferred.

Audrey and Madeline were whispering with Bob when Audrey suddenly heard her name called.

She turned, and was amazed. Jesse Church was speaking to her.

"Miss Chittenden, I wish to apologize for my five years' insult; I wish to thank you for your message of information; I want you to know how grateful I am."

She could not answer. All she could do was to smile faintly. The thought flashed through her brain that at last the day had come when Jesse Church had begged for forgiveness.

She replied simply: "Mr. Church, let me assure you I did not act as I did for you, but for Madeline."

"It is all the same," he replied and was gone.

She turned to see Madeline and Bob standing close by a look of astonishment in their eyes; but also a look of gratification.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Shortly after Bob and Madeline arrived at the office of Mr. Jontine.

"Well, Mrs. Church, rather dramatic proceedings, were they not?" he queried.

"I'm afraid they were, Mr Jontine," she replied.

"You may think it strange," he continued, "that I permitted counsel to withdraw his papers, and also, that I closed my address to the Court after the interruption. But you see, I considered it politic to do so. You had nothing to lose, I having already stated our argument, and by closing it where I did, it prevented Mr. Wilmot from speaking further."

"I guess we will have a decision within a day or two. As soon as I learn of it, I will communicate with you."

Then they left.

Two mornings later when Mr. Jontine arrived at his office, his chief clerk informed him there was a decision in the case of Church vs. Church.

In the New York Law Journal he saw the decision by Justice Dixwell:—

"Church *vs.* Church: This is a matrimonial action for "separation *a mensa et thoro,* accompanied by a motion for "alimony and counsel fee, together with a second motion for "the plaintiff's custody of the issue of the marriage between "plaintiff and defendant. The motion for alimony and coun- "sel fee having been consented to by the attorney for de- "fendant, there leaves only one question to be decided by "me, and that is, 'who shall have the custody of the child.' "The infant is a boy, six years of age, and since his birth "has been cared for by and lived with his mother, this plain- "tiff. There are no allegations set forth herein by the de- "fendant charging the plaintiff as an immoral or unfit person "to have the custody of the child, nor are there any similar "allegations by the plaintiff against the defendant. The "papers are free from charges against either. It seems hus- "band and wife cannot live happily together; that their tem- "peraments are unlike, and that they cannot agree. There- "fore this action. The defendant in his affidavit states to "the Court that he does not intend to defend this suit; that "he is willing that the plaintiff should receive the support "she asks, the same he has been paying her for the past "five years under an agreement in which plaintiff and defend- "ant agreed to separate, and which he will continue to pay "her when due; and that the counsel fee asked for by the "attorney for the plaintiff he will also pay without objection. "But the bone of contention existing now between the par- "ties is, 'who shall have the custody of this child?'

"In the separation agreement which defendant annexes "to his papers, there is a provision that said infant shall re- "main in the custody of the mother 'because of his tender "years,' referring to the boy. To this provision I shall not "attach much importance nor be guided by it, nor shall I

"consider it in any way.

"The conditions surrounding this case are most pathetic "and painful. Husband and wife cannot agree; neither "makes charges of immorality or unfitness against the other, "and it is left for me to decide to whom I shall give the "custody of this boy.

"The child is about six years old and cannot be considered "'of tender age' within the meaning of the law. The mother "is, therefore, no more entitled to her absolute care of him "than the father to be his guardian, and, consequently, the "law gives her no more rights in that respect than the hus- "band. (Schoular on Domestic Relations; Reeves on Do- "mestic Relations; Bishop on the Law of Marriage and "Divorce.) Of course, it is both painful and sad to take "a child from its mother, especially painful to the mother; "but can it be said that it is more so to her than to the "father? He possesses a love for his offspring as deep, as "true, as affectionate, as does the mother—at least, so the "law lays down (Supra). And while I am constrained to so "order, I must follow the decisions as set forth by my "brother jurists.

"I therefore deny the motion for the custody of the infant "in the plaintiff, only so far as it asks for permanent and "continuous retention, and direct that said infant be given "into the care of his mother, this plaintiff, for six months "of the calendar year, and to the father, this defendant, for "the other six months. The arrangements as to who shall "first have the possession of the child I leave to the parties "to agree. If they cannot, I will then direct further, on "application being made.

"The motion for alimony and counsel fee, of course, is "granted by default."

"Settle order on notice."

The application had been denied. Mr. Justice Dixwell had rendered his decision according to the law.

"I expected as much," Mr. Jontine soliloquized,

"and I'm sure I can't reverse him on appeal, even if I appealed. I'm sorry; sad case."

He immediately telephoned Bob to come at once.

Mr. Jontine gave him the decision to read. When he finished, Bob looked up.

"Well, can't anything more be done?" he asked.

And Mr. Jontine advised him that nothing could be done, and added:

"But really, is not that decision a fair and just one? Is not the Court right when he says that a father is as much entitled to his child as the mother?"

Bob immediately left for home. Audrey was there, and together they went at once to see Madeline, and report the ruling of the Court.

* * * * * * * *

The battle was over!

For days Madeline was ill, and Audrey feared for her ultimate recovery. Again, during the days of her convalescence she remained close by her side. And what did they not talk of; what memories did they not bring back to life!

Madeline agreed to permit the father to retain the child during the first six months, and so the matter was settled.

During convalescence when the warm rays of the sun in beautiful Spring shone through her bed-room window, and Audrey was not near, Madeline would spend hours in reflection.

She had been married six years, and during five of those years, she had been somewhat happy; but

they were five years apart from her husaand. Her child had given her the love she had expected to receive from him. Her moments were occupied with thoughts for her boy's welfare. She cared little for the husband and father.

All this was now changed. She could no longer revel in the love of her baby; he had been taken from her by the strong arm of the law. She could not know what trials and abuses he might encounter in the years to come; she only realized that he was to be thrown on the mercies of a cold and disinterested world—a world that cared little and was more hypocritical.

And as her thoughts travelled this way, she was reminded of that summer evening in July, six years before, when she had argued so strongly and so consistently with her friend, on the happiness, the morality, the fruits of the marriage state.

How she remembered what Audrey had said to her! Almost all the latter's thoughts and arguments had come true in her short married life; all her friend had insisted. And the way she had at first ridiculed her!

What a strange world we live in; what an uncertain thing life is; how little we know of the to-morrow; she thought.

For perhaps an hour she had been sitting with a book in her hand, apparently reading, but not seeing a word.

Suddenly someone came into the room, and she woke with a start.

"Why——," she exclaimed, drowsily, and the intruder laughingly inquired:

"A penny for your thoughts, dear."

"Oh, I was only thinking, Audrey; that's all."

"I know it, Madeline; tell me—of the past or the future?"

"Of both; of all time, that which has gone never to return, and that which is to come."

"Well?" Audrey softly inquired.

"Audrey, you remember some years ago when mother died, you asked me to come to you, to live with you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm going to give you your answer soon."

Audrey in delight, quickly interrupted:

"Tell me now."

"No, not yet; when Bob is here I'll tell you."

Audrey pouted. "Well, if I can't persuade you; very well; I'll wait," she replied.

* * * * * * * *

That evening Bob called for Audrey. They passed a time as happy as could be expected in the circumstances. The two friends did all in their power to bar from Madeline the reflections they knew were making her sad.

Later she addressed them both.

"Dear friends," she said, "Audrey long ago invited me to come and live with you. I then refused. But the day has come when I find myself alone in the world—no mother; no husband; no child; and I am selfish. I do not blame the world; I have no fault to find. It may be that it was not to be so;

that we were ill-mated; I cannot say. But the fact is evident: I am alone."

A tear shone in her eye. "You two have been my only solace; my dearest friends; the best I have ever known and am sure will ever have the good fortune to know. You have always been near me in my time of sorrow and trouble, and when you have not, you have come to me when I called."

She ceased for a moment. They did not interrupt her.

"Now," she resumed, "you show me how much I owe you; how helpless and friendless I am. If it were not for you I do not know what my to-morrow would be."

Audrey had risen, and going to her, she kissed and lovingly embraced her.

"Oh, pshaw, Madeline; we've done nothing; it was but little we could do to prove our friendship—my friendship that was born in our chidhood, and grew as we grew. I'm sure you would have done the same for me. It's nothing, dear, nothing."

"My sentiments exactly, Madeline," joined in Bob, feelingly.

"Well, I know I would not have received the same attention and evidence of love, from others; I may not have acted so well as you give me credit for. But let me say, and I know it is but little to show my appreciation; my gratitude—let me say—I shall never forget it."

She smiled sadly, and then went on:

"The day has come when I am ready to accept your latest proof of friendship. I," she looked at

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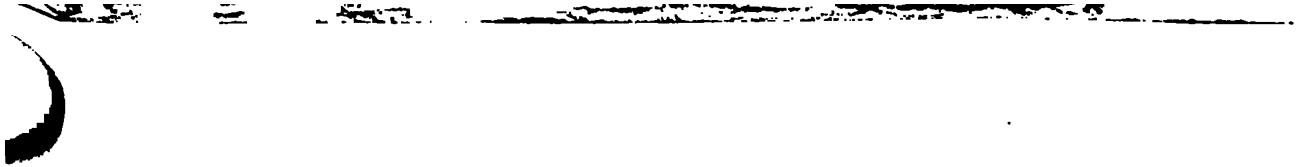

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